

Ancient Sexuality

Part One



Prepared by Robert G. Bedrosian

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The Origin of Prostitution in Ancient Mesopotamia

Gerda Lerner

"Prostitution, often known as the world's oldest profession, can be traced throughout recorded history." Thus the common wisdom holds, making prostitution appear as a "natural" by-product of human social formation, needing no explanation. Other experts disagree. "Prostitution," as we are told in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "has not, so far as is known, been a cultural universal. In sexually permissive societies it is often rare because it is unnecessary, whereas in other societies it has been largely suppressed." In his magisterial treatment of the history of prostitution, the German physician Iwan Bloch informs us that it develops as a by-product of the regulation of sexuality: "Prostitution appears among primitive people wherever free sexual intercourse is curtailed or limited. It is nothing else than a substitute for a new form of primitive promiscuity."¹

While this is undoubtedly true, it does not explain under what conditions prostitution arises and becomes institutionalized in a given society. It

This article will appear as part of a forthcoming book, *Women and History*, vol. 1, *The Establishment of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). For their critical reading of this essay I am greatly indebted to Professors Anne D. Kilmer, Department of Near Eastern Studies, University of California, Berkeley; Jerrold Cooper, Department of Near Eastern Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore; Denise Schmandt-Besserat, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas at Austin; Frank M. Clover and Linda Gordon, Department of History, University of Wisconsin—Madison; and Alice Kessler-Harris, Department of History, Hofstra University, New York. Their suggestions and criticisms were most helpful; any errors are my own.

1. *Encyclopedia Americana* (1982), s.v. "prostitution"; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "prostitution"; Iwan Bloch, *Die Prostitution* (Berlin: L. Marcies, 1912), pp. 170–71 (my translation).

also ignores the commercial aspect of prostitution by treating it as though it were simply a variant form of sexual arrangement among consenting parties. Bloch accepts the existence of a "natural" state of promiscuity, which is later supplanted by various forms of structured marriage. This nineteenth-century theory, as elaborated by J. J. Bachofen and the American ethnologist Lewis Henry Morgan, formed the foundation of Friedrich Engels's analysis, which has influenced so much of modern feminist theory:

Hetaerism derives quite directly from group marriage, from the ceremonial surrender by which women purchased the right of chastity. Surrender for money was at first a religious act; it took place in the temple of the goddess of love, and the money originally went into the temple treasury. . . . Among other peoples hetaerism derives from the sexual freedom allowed girls before marriage. . . . With the rise of the inequality of property . . . wage labor appears sporadically side by side with slave labor, and at the same time, as its necessary correlate, the professional prostitution of free women side by side with the forced surrender of the slave. . . . For hetaerism is as much a social institution as any other; it continues the old sexual freedom—to the advantage of the men.

A few pages later Engels refers to prostitution as "the complement" of monogamous marriage and predicts its demise "with the transformation of the means of production into social property."²

Even as we dismiss Engels's patent Victorian bias in expecting women to be desirous of exercising their "right to chastity," we must note his insight that the origin of prostitution derives both from changing attitudes toward sexuality and from certain religious beliefs, and that changes in economic and social conditions at the time of the institutionalization of private property and of slavery affected sexual relations. No matter how many flaws and errors in scientific evidence one can show in Engels's work, he was the first to alert us to these connections and to see the essential nexus of social and sexual relations. With his formulation of the analogy between the coexistence of free and slave labor and the coexistence of the "professional prostitution of free women side by side with the forced surrender of the slave," he has pointed us toward a redefinition of the concept of "class" for men and women that he himself unfortunately ignored in his subsequent work.

To understand the historic development of prostitution we need to follow Engels's lead and examine its relationship to the sexual regulation

2. Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), pp. 129–30, 138–39. Engels's reference to temple prostitution is based on his uncritical acceptance of the account of the Greek writer, Herodotus.

of all women in archaic states and its relationship to the enslavement of females. But first we must deal with the most widely accepted explanation of the origin of prostitution, namely, that it derives from "temple prostitution."

It is unfortunate that most authorities use the same term to cover a broad range of behavior and activities and to encompass at least two forms of organized prostitution—religious and commercial—which occur in archaic states. We are told, for example, that in Mesopotamian society (and elsewhere) sacred prostitution, which characterized ancient fertility cults and goddess worship, led to commercial prostitution.³

The sequence is at best doubtful. The use of the term "sacred prostitution" for any and all sexual practices connected with temple service keeps us from understanding the meaning such practices had for contemporaries. I will therefore distinguish between "cultic sexual service" and "prostitution," by which I mean commercial prostitution only.

Cultic sexual service by men and women may date back to the Neolithic age and to various cults of the Mother-Goddess or of the so-called Great Goddess in her many manifestations.⁴ The archeological evidence of the existence of female figurines, with emphasized breasts, hips, and buttocks, is abundant all over Europe, the Mediterranean, and Eastern Asia. In many places such figurines were found in what archeologists have interpreted as shrines, but there is no way of our knowing in what manner these figurines were used or worshiped. Nor will we ever know.

In contrast, we have ample historically valid evidence—linguistic, literary, pictorial, and legal—from which we can reconstruct the worship of female goddesses and the lives and activities of priestesses in Ancient Mesopotamia and in the Neo-Babylonian period.

The ancient Babylonians thought of the gods and goddesses as actually dwelling in the temple, not as symbolically represented there. The staff of the temple, the various ranks of priests and priestesses, artisans, workmen, and slaves, all labored to care for and feed the gods as they might have labored to care for and feed a lord. Daily, the meals were carefully prepared and set out for the god, his bed was prepared, music

3. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "prostitution"; *Encyclopedia Americana* (1982), s.v. "prostitution"; Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *The History of Prostitution: An Illustrated Social History* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1978), pp. 19–20; Bloch, 1:70–71; F. Henriques, *Prostitution and Society* (London: McGibbon & Kee, 1962), chap. 1; William Sanger, *A History of Prostitution* (New York: Medical Publishing Co., 1858), pp. 40–41; Geoffrey May, "Prostitution," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1934), 13:553–59; Max Ebert, *Reallexicon der Vorgeschichte* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1926), 5:323; Erich Ebeling and Bruno Meissner, "Geschlechtmoral" and "Hierodulen," in *Reallexicon der Assyriologie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1971), 4:223, 391–93.

4. Marija Alseikaite Gimbutas, *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982); Edwin O. James, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess: An Archeological and Documentary Study* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1959).

was played for his entertainment. For people who regarded fertility as sacred and essential to their own survival, the caring for the gods included, in some cases, offering them sexual services.⁵ Thus, a separate class of temple prostitutes developed. What seems to have happened was that sexual activity for and in behalf of the god or goddesses was considered beneficial to the people and sacred. The practices varied with the gods, the different places, and different periods. There was also, especially in the later period, commercial prostitution, which flourished near or within the temple. Again, modern scholars have been confusing the issue by referring to all of this activity as prostitution and by using the term "hierodule" without distinction for various types of women engaging in cultic or commercial sexual activity.⁶ It is only since 1956, when the first volume of the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* appeared, that it is possible to make more accurate use of the terms and distinguish, as the Babylonians did, different types of temple servants.

There is historic evidence of religious leadership by royal women. Two of these were Queen Baranamtarra (ca. 2350 B.C.) and her successor Queen Shagshag of Lagash. Both were the wives of kings and as such were in charge of the economic administration of the temple of the goddess Bau, as the king was in charge of the temple of the chief male god.⁷

In the Old Babylonian period, the daughters of kings and rulers were appointed as high priestesses of the Moon-God or of the Goddess Ishtar. The *en* or *entu* priestesses were the counterparts of male high priests. They wore distinctive clothing, a cap with raised rim, a folded garment, jewelry, and a staff, the same insignia and garments worn by the ruler. They lived inside the sacred shrine, had charge of temple management and affairs, performed ritual and ceremonial functions, and were usually unmarried. The *nin-dingir* priestess in ancient Sumer had a similar role. Assyriologists believe that it is this class of women who annually participated in the Sacred Marriage, impersonating or representing the goddess.

The basis for the ritual of the Sacred Marriage was the belief that fertility of the land and of people depended on the celebration of the sexual power of the fertility goddess. It is likely that this rite originated in the Sumerian city of Uruk, which was dedicated to the Goddess Inanna, earlier than 3000 B.C. The Sacred Marriage was that of the Goddess

5. A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 187–92.

6. Vern L. Bullough makes this same observation in "Attitudes toward Deviant Sex in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Sex, Society and History*, ed. Vern L. Bullough (New York: Science History Publishers, 1976), pp. 17–36 (see esp. pp. 22–23).

7. P. Anton Deimel, *Sumerische Tempelwirtschaft zur Zeit Urukaginas und seiner Vorgänger* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1931), pp. 75–112; I. M. Diakonoff, ed., *Ancient Mesopotamia: Socio-Economic History: A Collection of Studies by Soviet Scholars* (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), pp. 93–95.

Inanna and either the high priest, representing the god, or the king, identified with the God Dumuzi.⁸ In one typical poem, the encounter is initiated by the goddess, who expresses her eagerness for union with her lover. After their union, the land blossoms forth: "Plants rose high by his side, / Grains rose high by his side. . . ." The goddess, happy and satisfied, promises to bless the house of her husband, the shepherd/king: "My husband, the goodly storehouse, the holy stall, / I Inanna, will preserve you for, / I will watch over your 'house of life.'"⁹

The annual symbolic reenactment of this mythical union was a public celebration considered essential to the well-being of the community. It was the occasion of a joyous celebration, which may have involved sexual activity on the part of the worshipers in and around the temple grounds. It is important for us to understand that contemporaries regarded this occasion as sacred, as mythically significant for the well-being of the community, and that they regarded the king and the priestess with reverence and honored them for performing this "sacred" service.

The Sacred Marriage was performed in the temples of various fertility goddesses for nearly two thousand years. The young God-lover or son of the goddess was known as Tammuz, Attis, Adonis, Baal, and Osiris in various languages. In some of these rituals, the sacred union was preceded by the death of the young god, symbolizing a season of drought or infertility which ended only by his resurrection through his union with the goddess. It was she who could make him alive, who could make him king, and who could empower him to make the land fertile. Rich sexual imagery with its joyous worship of sexuality and fertility permeated poetry and myth and found expression in statuary and sculpture. Rites similar to the Sacred Marriage also flourished in classical Greece and pre-Christian Rome.¹⁰

While most of the information about *en* priestesses comes from the Old Babylonian period, there are many references to *nin-dingir* priestesses in the Neo-Babylonian period in Ur and Girsu. In the age of Hammurabi (1792–1750 B.C.) such priestesses could live outside the cloister, but their reputations were carefully guarded.¹¹

Next in rank to the *en* and *nin-dingir* came the *naditum* priestesses.

8. For discussion of the Sacred Marriage, see Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith, Myth and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 59; Thorkild Jacobsen, "Toward the Image of Tammuz," in *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture*, ed. William L. Moran (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 73–101; Judith Ochsorn, *The Female Experience and the Nature of the Divine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 124. See also W. G. Lambert, "Morals in Ancient Mesopotamia," *"Ex Oriente Lux"* *Jaarbericht, Vooraziatisch Egypt Genootschap*, no. 15 (1957–58), pp. 184–96, esp. 195.

9. Kramer, p. 59.

10. Jacobsen, pp. 73–101.

11. My comments about the female cultic servants are mostly based on the thorough study by Johannes Renger, "Untersuchungen zum Priestertum in der altbabylonischen

The word *naditum* means "left fallow," which is consistent with the evidence that they were forbidden childbearing.¹² We know a good deal about the *naditum* priestesses of the God Shamash and the God Marduk during the first dynasty of Babylon. They came from the upper levels of society; a few were kings' daughters, most were daughters of high bureaucrats, scribes, doctors, or priests. *Naditum* of the God Shamash entered a cloister at a young age and stayed unmarried. The cloister in which they lived with their servants consisted of a large complex of individual buildings within the temple. The cloister in the temple of the town of Sippar has been shown by excavation to have also contained a library and school and a graveyard.¹³ The cloister housed up to two hundred priestesses at a time, but the number of *naditum* gradually declined after the age of Hammurabi.¹⁴

Naditum brought rich dowries to the temple at the time of their dedication to the god. On their death, these dowries reverted to their families of birth. They could use these dowries as capital for business transactions and for loaning out money at interest, and they could leave the cloister in order to take care of their various business concerns. *Naditum* sold land, slaves, and houses; made loans and gifts; and managed herds and fields. We know the names of 185 female scribes who served in the temple of Sippar.¹⁵ From the proceeds of their business transactions the *naditum* regularly made offerings to the gods on festival days. Since they could not have children, *naditum* often adopted children to care for them in old age. Unlike other women of their time, they could will their property to female heirs, who, most likely, were family members also serving as priestesses.

Naditum of the God Marduk were uncloistered and could marry but

Zeit," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archeologie*, Neue Folge, 24th ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1967), 1:110–88.

12. G. R. Driver and John C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1952). Driver and Miles think that the *naditum*, although unmarried, may not have made a vow of chastity, "for it is likely that she was in some temples, as for instance, those of Ishtar, a sacral prostitute" (1:366).

13. *Ibid.*, 1:359.

14. The most complete study of these women is Rivkah Harris, *Ancient Sippar: A Demographic Study of an Old-Babylonian City (1894–1595 B.C.)* (Istanbul: Historisch-Archeologisch Instituut, 1975), esp. p. 304 on their numbers. See also Renger, pp. 156–68. Renger, Driver and Miles, and Benno Landsberger, E. Reiner, and M. Civil (*Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon* 12 [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969]) regard the *naditum* as priestesses, but Harris sees no evidence of their performing any religious function. She says their position was that of "daughter-in-law to the God Shamash and his bride Aja." As such they performed all the customary ritual services of daughters-in-law. Harris regards their function as "cultic" in that their lives were dedicated to the service of the god (pp. 308–9).

15. Harris, p. 285.

were not allowed to have children. It is this group of women which is particularly the subject of regulation in the Codex Hammurabi (hereafter referred to as CH). A *naditum* could provide children for her husband by giving him a slave woman or a low-ranking temple servant called *sugitum* as a concubine or second wife. Hammurabic law elaborately provides for the inheritance rights of such children, which may indicate the importance of the *naditum* in the social order. It could also indicate that their social position had become somewhat precarious during Hammurabi's reign or that it was undergoing some kind of change. The latter fact may explain the inclusion of CH 110, which metes out the death penalty for an uncloistered *naditum* who enters an ale house or runs such an establishment. If the "ale house" implies, as the commentator seems to think, a brothel or an inn frequented by prostitutes, the obvious meaning of the law is that a *naditum* is forbidden all association with such a place. She must not only live respectably but must also guard her reputation so as to be above reproach.¹⁶ The need for recording such a law may indicate a looseness of morals among the cultic servants. It also indicates, as we will discuss below, an increased desire on the part of the lawmakers (or of the compilers of laws) to draw clear lines of distinction between respectable and nonrespectable women.

Kulmashitum and *qadishtum* were lower-ranking temple servants, usually mentioned together in the texts. The distinction between them is not well understood. Their inheritance rights are specified in CH 181, according to which they are entitled to one-third of their inheritance out of the paternal estate if they were not given a dowry upon entering temple service. But they only hold use rights in their portion of the inheritance as long as they live. Their inheritance belonged to their brothers.¹⁷ Driver and Miles interpret the fact that the inheritance of these temple servants reverts to their brothers as indicating that they were not expected to produce children. This supposition seems contradicted by the evidence from a number of sources that *qadishtum* not infrequently served as paid wet nurses and must, therefore, themselves have had children. They may have lived outside the cloister and married after they had spent a certain period of time in temple service. Or they may have been prostitutes while in the temple service. If so, their employment by wealthy people as wet

16. Driver and Miles, 2:45, 1:205–6. It also illustrates, incidentally, that contemporaries regarded cultic sexual services rendered by priestesses in quite a different light from commercial prostitution. Renger comments as follows on this passage: "The interests of the state, as expressed in legal practice and in the Codex Hammurabi, were directed toward guaranteeing the financial independence of a *naditum* in order to avoid that she would turn to prostitution due to her insufficient income. That is also why she lived in the *gagum* [cloister]" (p. 156; my translation).

17. Driver and Miles, 2:73, 369–70. The authors translate *kulmashitum* as "hierodule" and *qadishtum* as "votaress."

nurses would indicate that their social role was not held in contempt. To make matters even more confusing, there are texts in which the Goddess Ishtar is herself called a *qadishtu*.¹⁸

There are two other "historic" accounts of sexual activities in and around the Babylonian temples, both of which have unduly influenced modern historians. One was written by the Greek historian Herodotus in the fifth century B.C. and purports to describe religious prostitution in the temple of the Goddess Mylitta; the other was written by the Roman traveler Strabo some four hundred years later, confirming Herodotus. Here is Herodotus's account:

Every woman born in the country must once in her life go and sit down in the precinct of Venus [Mylitta], and there consort with a stranger. . . . A woman who has once taken her seat is not allowed to return home till one of the strangers throws a silver coin into her lap, and takes her with him beyond the holy ground. . . . The silver coin may be of any size. . . . The woman goes with the first man who throws her money, and rejects no one. When she has gone with him, and so satisfied the goddess, she returns home, and from that time forth no gift however great will prevail with her. Such of the women . . . who are ugly have to stay a long time before they can fulfill the law. Some have waited three or four years in the precinct.¹⁹

There is no confirmation besides Strabo's for this story, and there are no known "laws" regulating or even referring to this practice. Herodotus may have mistaken the activities of prostitutes around the temple for a rite involving every Assyrian virgin.

Another of Herodotus's stories, told to him by Babylonian priests, seems to have more historic foundation. It described a high tower in the temple of Marduk, at the top of which the high priestess dwelt in a room with a couch, in which she was nightly visited by the god. The story somewhat parallels a historic account, dating from the first millennium B.C., which describes how the Neo-Babylonian King Nabu-naid dedicated his daughter as high priestess of the Moongod Sin. He surrounded the building in which she lived with a high wall and furnished it with orna-

18. Harris, p. 327. Some Orientalists make no distinction between these two kinds of temple servants and translate both as "hierodule" and describe them as being engaged in "sacred prostitution." Driver and Miles point out that there is no evidence for or against this interpretation, but there are cases when the Goddess Ishtar herself has been referred to as a *qadishtum* (2:369-70). For examples of differing translations of the word *qadishtu*, see Paul Koschaker, *Rechtsvergleichende Studien zur Gesetzgebung Hammurapis, Koenigs von Babylon* (Leipzig: Veit & Co., 1917), p. 189; Driver and Miles, 1:369.

19. Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, trans. George Rawlinson (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1910), 1:102.

ments and fine furniture. This description would be consistent with what we know of the living conditions of some of the royal high priestesses and with the belief that the god visited them nightly, just as he nightly ate the meals prepared for him. Herodotus cites this as an example of "temple prostitution," and modern historians of prostitution repeat the tale after him, treating his accounts as facts. I interpret the function of the priestess as a significant example of sacral sexual service, which may have been actually carried out or may have been symbolically reenacted.²⁰

From the conflicting interpretations of the evidence we have about the activities of women in temple service, it is difficult to arrive at an understanding of these women's social role. What earlier was a purely religious cultic function may have become corrupted at a time when commercial prostitution already flourished in the temple precincts. Sexual intercourse performed for strangers in the temple to honor the fertility and sexual power of the goddess may customarily have been rewarded by a donation to the temple. Worshipers regularly brought offerings of food, oil, wine, and precious goods to the temple to honor the deities and in the hope of thus advancing their own cause. It is conceivable that this practice corrupted some of the temple servants, tempting them to keep all or some of these gifts for their own profit. Priests may also have encouraged or permitted the use of slave women and the lower class of temple servants as commercial prostitutes in order to enrich the temple.

Two other classes of female temple servants can be briefly noted. One was the group of *secretu*, mentioned in the Codex Hammurabi in connection with inheritance laws. They were women of high rank, who probably lived cloistered.²¹ Finally, there was a class of *harimtu*, who were prostitutes attached to the temple. These may have been daughters of slave women, and they were under the supervision of a minor temple official. It is unclear whether such women were considered to belong to the temple harem. Given that the Sippar texts list only eleven such women, it seems likely that they were slave women owned by priests or priestesses. These slaves' commercial earnings, like those of other slave workers, were turned over to their owners, who may then have given these sums to the temple.

Findings discussed thus far show, then, that by the middle of the first millennium B.C., if not earlier, there were two kinds of sexual activities carried on in or near the temples: sexual rites that were part of the religious ritual and commercial prostitution. Temples, like medieval churches, served as centers for a wide range of commercial activities. Male and female prostitutes were visible around the temples because that is where the potential customers were. There was probably a geographic

20. Driver and Miles, 1:361–62.

21. Ibid., 1:368–69.

connection between temple and commercial prostitution. The causal connection taken for granted by historians, namely, that commercial prostitution developed out of temple prostitution, seems far less obvious than has generally been assumed.

Some linguistic evidence sheds light on the actual development of prostitution. The Sumerian word for female prostitute, *kar.kid*, occurs in the earliest lists of professions dating back to ca. 2400 B.C. Since it appears right after *nam.lukur*, which means "naditu-ship," one can assume its connection with temple service. It is of interest that the term *kur-garru*, a male prostitute or transvestite entertainer, appears on the same list but together with entertainers. This linkage results from a practice connected with the cult of Ishtar, in which transvestites performed acts using knives. On the same list we find the following female occupations: lady doctor, scribe, barber, cook. Obviously, prostitution, while it is a very old profession, is not the oldest.²² Prostitutes continue to appear on several later lists of professions in the Middle Babylonian period. On a seventh-century B.C. list there appear a variety of female entertainers, as well as transvestites, along with a midwife, nurse, sorceress, wet nurse, and "a gray-haired old lady." Prostitutes are listed again as *kar.kid* and by the Akkadian term *harimtu*. It is very interesting that among the twenty-five scribes on this list, there is no female scribe and that the doctors include no female doctors.²³

The earliest references on clay tablet texts connect *harimtu* with taverns. There is a sentence that reads, "When I sit in the entrance of the tavern, I, Ishtar, am a loving *harimtu*."²⁴ These and other references have led to the association of Ishtar with taverns and with both ritual and commercial prostitution.

The existence of various occupational groups connected both with cultic sexual service and with commercial prostitution tells us little about the meaning these occupations held to contemporaries. We can try to learn something about that by looking at the earliest known poetic myth, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. The poem, which describes the exploits of a legendary god/king, who may actually have lived at the beginning of the third millennium B.C., has survived in several versions, the most complete of which is the Akkadian version, apparently based on earlier Sumerian tales written during the first millennium B.C. In the poem, Gilgamesh's aggres-

22. Old Babylonian Proto-Lu list, in Landsberger, Reiner, and Civil, pp. 58-59. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Anne D. Kilmer of the Department of Near Eastern Studies, University of California, Berkeley, for her help in pointing out these lists to me and translating them.

23. Ibid., Canonical Series *lu-sha*, pp. 104-5.

24. *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1968), 6:101-2.

sive behavior has displeased his subjects and the gods: "Day and night [is unbridled his arrogance]. . . . / Gilgamesh leaves not the maid to [her mother], / the warrior's daughter, the noble spouse!"²⁵

The gods create a man, "his double" Enkidu, to contend with Gilgamesh. Enkidu lives in harmony with the animals in the woods: "He knows neither people nor land." After Enkidu is discovered by a hunter and flees, the hunter seeks counsel as to how to tame him. He is told to get a *harimtu*. The hunter brings her to the woods, tells her what to do: "and he [Enkidu] possessed her ripeness. / She was not bashful as she welcomed his ardor. / She laid aside her cloth and he rested upon her. / She treated him, the savage, to a woman's task, / as his love was drawn unto her."

After mating with her for six days, Enkidu finds that the wild beasts are afraid of him: "He now had [wi]sdom, [br]oader understanding." The harlot advises him: "Come, let me lead thee [to] ramparted Uruk, / To the holy temple, abode of Anu and Ishtar, / Where lives Gilgamesh."²⁶ Enkidu agrees and the harlot leads him to Gilgamesh, whose best friend he becomes.

In this myth the temple harlot is an accepted part of society. Her role is honorable; in fact, it is she who is chosen to civilize the wild man. The assumption here is that sexuality is civilizing, pleasing to the gods. The harlot does "a woman's task"; thus she is not set off from other women because of her occupation. She possesses a kind of wisdom, which tames the wild man. He follows her lead into the city of civilization.

According to another *Gilgamesh* fragment, which has only recently been published, Enkidu later regrets his entry into civilization. He curses the hunter and the *harimtu* for having removed him from his former life of freedom in nature. He speaks an elaborate curse against the *harimtu*: "I will curse you with a great curse . . . / you shall not build a house for your debauch / you shall not enter the tavern of girls. . . . May waste places be your couch, / May the shadow of the town-wall be your stand / May thorn and bramble skin your feet / May drunkard and toper alike slap your cheek."²⁷ The nature of this curse tells us that the *harimtu* who mated with Enkidu lived an easier and better life than the harlot who has her stand at the town wall and is abused by her drunken customers. This would confirm the distinction we made earlier between the women engaged in various forms of sacral sexual service and commercial prostitutes. Such a distinction was more likely to have existed in the earlier period than later.

25. "The Epic of Gilgamesh," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 74.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.

27. J. Gadd, "Some Contributions to the Gilgamesh Epic," *Iraq* 28, pt. 2 (Autumn 1966): 105–21, esp. 108.

It is likely that commercial prostitution derived directly from the enslavement of women and the consolidation and formation of classes. Military conquest led, in the third millennium B.C., to the enslavement and sexual abuse of captive women. As slavery became an established institution, slave owners rented out their female slaves as prostitutes, and some masters set up commercial brothels staffed by slaves. The ready availability of captive women for private sexual use and the need of kings and chiefs, frequently themselves usurpers of authority, to establish legitimacy by displaying their wealth in the form of servants and concubines led to the establishment of harems. These, in turn, became symbols of power to be emulated by aristocrats, bureaucrats, and wealthy men.²⁸

Another source for commercial prostitution was the pauperization of farmers and their increasing dependence on loans in order to survive periods of famine, which led to debt slavery. Children of both sexes were given up for debt pledges or sold for "adoption." Out of such practices, the prostitution of female family members for the benefit of the head of the family could readily develop. Women might end up as prostitutes because their parents had to sell them into slavery or because their impoverished husbands might so use them. Or they might become self-employed as a last alternative to enslavement. With luck, they might in this profession be upwardly mobile through becoming concubines. By the middle of the second millennium B.C., prostitution was well established as a likely occupation for the daughters of the poor.

As the sexual regulation of women of the propertied class became more firmly entrenched, the virginity of respectable daughters became a financial asset for the family. Thus, commercial prostitution came to be seen as a social necessity for meeting the sexual needs of men. What remained problematic was how to distinguish clearly and permanently between respectable and nonrespectable women. Perhaps another problem which needed solution was how to discourage men from associating socially with women now defined as "nonrespectable." Both purposes were served by the enactment of Middle Assyrian Law (MAL) 40.

Before proceeding to an analysis of the law, we need to understand that Assyrian society was more militaristic, and its law code was generally harsher, than that of Babylonia. It is therefore difficult to say how representative this single law is of practices in other Mesopotamian societies. While there is no similar law to be found in the other surviving legal compilations, Assyriologists generally assume that a common body of legal concepts prevailed in the region for nearly two thousand years. Other regulations of female sexuality also show similarities among the

28. For a detailed treatment of the subject, see Gerda Lerner, "Women and Slavery," *Slavery and Abolition: A Journal of Comparative Studies* 4, no. 3 (December 1983): 173-98.

various law codes; thus one can assume that MAL 40 was representative. Most importantly, the practice of veiling, on which it legislates, has been so ubiquitous and lasted for so many millennia into this century, that one can justify the assumption that we are here dealing with the earliest known example of such a regulation, which was practiced in many other societies as well.²⁹

Middle Assyrian Law 40 reads as follows:

Neither (wives) of (seigniors) nor (widows) nor (Assyrian women) who go out on the street may have their heads uncovered. The daughters of a seignior . . . whether it is a shawl or a robe or a mantle, must veil themselves. . . . When they go out on the street alone, they must veil themselves. A concubine who goes out on the street with her mistress must veil herself. A sacred prostitute whom a man married must veil herself on the street, but one whom a man did not marry must have her head uncovered on the street; she must not veil herself. A harlot must not veil herself; her head must be uncovered.³⁰

The law also specifies that a slave girl must not veil herself. The veil, the symbol and emblem of the married woman, is here elevated to a distinguishing mark and its wearing made a privilege. Yet the list seems curious. Veiling does not seem to distinguish the free from the unfree, nor the upper class from the lower. Harlots and unmarried sacred prostitutes may be free women, yet they are grouped with slaves. A slave concubine may be veiled if accompanied by her mistress, but even a freeborn concubine may not be veiled if she walks out alone. On closer examination we can see that the distinction between the women is based on their sexual activities. Domestic women, sexually serving one man and under his protection, are here designated as "respectable" by being veiled; women not under one man's protection and sexual control are designated as "public women," hence unveiled.

If the law did no more than setting down these rules it would represent a historical watershed for women: the legal classification of women according to their sexual activities. But the law goes further by specifying the punishment for violators: "He who has seen a harlot veiled must arrest her, produce witnesses (and) bring her to the palace tribunal; they shall not take her jewelry away (but) the one who arrested her may take

29. My interpretation of the Middle Assyrian Laws (MAL) is based on extensive reading in all the various extant translations of Mesopotamian law compilation. For MAL I have read "The Middle Assyrian Laws," trans. Theophile J. Meek, in Pritchard, ed.; D. D. Luckenbill and F. W. Geers, trans., in J. M. Powis Smith, *The Origin and History of Hebrew Law* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931); and G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935). All textual quotes are from Driver and Miles.

30. All quotations below of MAL 40 are from Pritchard, ed., p. 183.

her clothing; they shall flog her fifty (times) with staves (and) pour pitch on her head.”

Here, what began as a minor, seemingly petty regulation of morality, is suddenly regarded as a major offense against the state. Witnesses must be secured; the accused must be brought before a “palace tribunal,” that is, a court. The harlot’s jewelry is left to her, presumably because it is the tool of her trade, but her punishment is harsh. It is also highly symbolic: covering her head with pitch gives her the only kind of “veil” to which her lowly state entitles her. Practically speaking, it also must have rendered her unfit for earning her living; removing the pitch would necessitate shaving her head and would thus disfigure her for a long time.

The law goes on to specify the punishment for a slave girl who is caught wearing a veil: she shall have her clothes taken away and have her ears cut off. One can only speculate on the meaning of the difference in punishment meted out to the harlot and the slave girl. Is having one’s ears cut off a lesser punishment than being beaten fifty stripes with staves? Is it harsher? If so, does it reflect the usual assumption of Mesopotamian law that the lowest-ranking person should suffer the most stringent punishment? In that case, does it tell us that a harlot has higher status than a slave? Apparently so.

The most interesting aspect of the law, however, concerns the punishment meted out to the person (the man) who fails to report a violation of the veiling law: “If a seignior has seen a harlot veiled and has let (her) go without bringing her to the palace tribunal they shall flog that seignior fifty (times) with staves; they shall pierce his ears, thread (them) with a cord, (and) tie (it) at his back, (and) he shall do the work of the king for one full month.”

The punishment for the man who does not denounce a veiled slave girl is the same, except that he shall also have his clothes taken from him by “his prosecutor.” Driver and Miles, in their commentary on Assyrian law, explain that there is no corresponding law in the Babylonian law codes. They explain the meaning of the man’s punishment: having his ears pierced and a cord passed through them makes him appear to be bridled, “perhaps so that he may be led through the streets and exposed to public ridicule.”³¹ They conclude that the law

serves to distinguish ladies and other respectable women from harlots and slave girls. Further, while the law inflicts no penalty on a respectable woman who omits to wear the veil, it takes every possible means to prevent the wrongful assumption of it. . . . Wearing the veil is a privilege of the upper classes which the law is determined for

31. Driver and Miles, *Assyrian Laws*, p. 134.

some reason or other to maintain. It is conceivable that it may have been some sort of extension of the usage of the harem whereby a woman who is enclosed in private must also be enclosed in public.³²

This analysis is astute, yet the authors admit that the purpose of the law is to them "obscure."

Quite to the contrary, the purpose of the law is devastatingly clear. We note that the state intervenes in prescribing the dress of women by passing the law and by requiring the bringing of the offender before a court, the calling of witnesses, and the use of a prosecutor. We note also that, unlike the other crimes described in these laws, a woman's crime of "unauthorized veiling" or "passing herself off as being respectable" is an offense so great that its enforcement is made mandatory by savage punishment of any sympathetic and noncompliant men. We note also that the punishment is public: whipping, stripping naked in the street, being paraded in the street. Thus the matter of classifying women into respectable and nonrespectable has become an affair of the state.

Middle Assyrian Law 40 institutionalizes a ranking order for women: at the top, the married lady or her unmarried daughter; beneath her, but still counted among the respectable, the married concubine, whether freeborn or slave or temple prostitute; at the bottom, clearly marked off as not respectable, the unmarried temple prostitute, the harlot, and the slave woman.

The listing of the unmarried temple prostitute, presumably the *kulmashitum* and *qadishtum*, on the same level as a commercial harlot, the *harimtu*, and the temple harlot of slave origin is a distinct declassing of the former. The sacral nature of sexual temple service is no longer the decisive factor; more and more the temple prostitute is regarded the same way as the commercial prostitute.

Why did the law apply with greater severity to slave girls than to prostitutes? Slave girls were already distinguishable from free women by their hairstyle and possibly by a brand on their forehead. The most obvious reason would be that veiling might hide such identifying marks and thus allow a slave woman to "pass" as free. But the law also seeks to distinguish sharply between the slave woman and the slave concubine. The latter, when accompanied by her mistress, that is by the first wife of the master, was to be treated as a respectable woman. In such a case her servile status would be clearly indicated, as we know from previously cited cases, by her walking behind her mistress, possibly carrying the mistress's stool or other belongings. Other slave women in the household who were not concubines would be identifiable in the street by not being veiled and thus revealing their slave marks. The immediate result of MAL 40 would

32. Ibid.

be to allow the slave concubine a publicly recognized status different from that of the ordinary slave woman in the household. This conforms to the various other legal and social practices, which place concubines in a social position intermediate between slave women and free wives.

The punishment meted out to men who were insufficiently vigilant in denouncing and persecuting women violators has other interesting implications. For one, it shows us that enforcement was a problem. If all men, or even most of them, had been eager and willing to enforce the law against women who violated it, no punishment would be needed against men who failed to do so. Did men think the law irrelevant? Did men of the lower classes think the law represented only the interest of upper-class men, and were they therefore lax in their cooperation?³³ We may never know the answer to these questions, but the fact that enforcement of the veiling law met resistance indicates that it must have been problematic, for a time at least, for those who wished to see it enforced. Clearly, those who wished to see the law enforced regarded it as important to the interests of the state, which would mean of elite propertied men, bureaucrats, and possibly the class of temple officials.

How was a man to know whether the veiled woman he saw in the street was entitled to her veil? This is puzzling. It would surely be difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish one veiled woman from another, if we assume the veil covered not only her face and head, but her figure as well.³⁴ The prohibition could therefore not have applied to total strangers. Most likely, it applied only to women who were accompanied by men. A man walking in the street with a veiled woman would presumably know her social standing. If she were veiled without being entitled to that privilege, he could be held responsible under the law. At first glance the occurrence of such an incident—a man walking in the street with a veiled harlot or slave girl—seems so farfetched, one must wonder about the need to have a law forbidding it.

But what if the intent of the law were to discourage, even forbid, men from casually and publicly associating with prostitutes and slave women? The effect of such a law would then be to lower the social standing of these women and restrict their activities to purely commercial sexual services. The law might then represent an early instance of the many laws passed over the millennia regulating prostitution. Such laws always have fallen with unequal severity upon the prostitute and her customer. Having to appear in public unveiled would at once identify a woman as a prostitute

33. Pritchard translates *awilum* as "seignior," but other translators use the term "burgher" and indicate it might mean "noble" as well. Thus, both upper- and middle-class men of property might have been included in the term.

34. We may leave unquestioned the implied assumption that every man would know, if he saw them unveiled, who were the harlots and who were the respectable women.

and mark her off from respectable women. It would also make a man's association with a prostitute an activity clearly distinguishable from his social contact with respectable women.

It is noteworthy that MAL 40 provides punishment only for declassed women and nonconforming men. Why are there no punishments provided for women who fail to denounce violators of the veiling law? Mesopotamian law held women fully accountable for their deeds in other cases. Was it assumed that respectable women would need no incentive for cooperating with the law because it was in their interest to discourage men of their class from associating with declassed women? Or did the law represent the response of upper-class persons of both sexes against lower-class persons who attempted to blur class distinctions among women? The possibility that upper-class women had an interest in this legislation can neither be discounted nor proven. What is clear is that the severity and public nature of the punishment made state intervention into private morality the dominant feature of the law.

Class formation demands visible means of distinguishing those belonging to different classes. Clothing, ornaments or their absence, and, in the case of slaves, visible marks of status occur in all societies which make such distinctions important. It is not greatly significant whether MAL 40 initiated such a practice regarding women or whether it is simply the earliest example for which we have historical evidence. What is important is to examine the way in which class distinctions were institutionalized for women and to distinguish it from the way in which this was done for men. The veiled wife, concubine, or virgin daughter was visibly identifiable by any man as being under the protection of another man. As such she was marked off as inviolate and inviolable. Conversely, the unveiled woman was clearly marked off as unprotected and therefore fair game for any man. This pattern of enforced visible discrimination recurs throughout historical time in the myriad of regulations that place "disreputable women" in certain districts or certain houses marked with clearly identifiable signs or that force them to register with the authorities and carry identification cards. Similarly, the way in which the unprotected slave girl is distinguished from the concubine will recur in many variations. One of them is the custom in the United States, during slavery times and after, of segregated eating facilities for black and white—except for those black people clearly identifiable as servants. Thus, black nurses and child minders may appear in segregated places with their white charges; black valets may accompany their masters.

Men take their place in the class hierarchy based on their occupations or on their fathers' social status. Their class position may be expressed by the usual outward signs—clothing, residential location, ornaments, or their absence. For women, from MAL 40 forward, class distinctions are

based on their relationship—or absence of such—to a man who protects them and on their sexual activities. The division of women into “respectable women,” who are protected by their men, and “disreputable women,” who are out in the street unprotected by men and free to sell their services, has been the basic class division for women. It has marked off the limited privileges of upper-class women against the economic and sexual oppression of lower-class women and has divided women one from the other. Historically, it has impeded cross-class alliances among women and obstructed the formation of feminist consciousness.

* * *

The Codex Hammurabi marks the beginning of the institutionalization of the patriarchal family as an aspect of state power. It reflected a class society in which women's status depended on the male family head's social status and property. Without her volition or action, the wife of an impoverished burgher could, by a change of his status, be turned from a respectable woman into a debt slave or a prostitute. On the other hand, a married woman's sexual behavior, such as adultery, or an unmarried woman's loss of chastity could declass her in a way in which no man could be declassified by his sexual activity. Women's class status is always differently defined from that of men of their class, from that period to the present.

From the Old Babylonian period to the time when the husband has power of life or death over the adulterous wife there have been great changes also in the authority of kings and rulers over the lives of men and women. The patriarchal head of the family at the time of Hammurabi was still somewhat restrained in his power over his wife by kinship obligations to the male head of the wife's family. By the time of the Middle Assyrian Laws he is restrained mostly by the power of the state. Fathers, empowered to treat the virginity of their daughters as a family property asset, represent an authority as absolute as that of the king. Children reared and socialized within such authority will grow into the kinds of citizens needed in an absolutist kingship. The king's power was secured by men as absolutely dependent on and subservient to him as their families were dependent on and subservient to them. The archaic state was shaped and developed in the form of patriarchy.

As such, hierarchy and class privilege were organic to its functioning. Thus, a harlot who presumed to appear veiled on the streets was as great a threat to the social order as was the mutinous soldier or slave. The virginity of daughters and the monogamous faithfulness of wives have become important features of the social order. With MAL 40 the state has assumed the control of female sexuality, which had previously been left to individual heads of families or to kin groups. From the middle of the

second millennium B.C. on, from public veiling to the regulation by the state of birth control and abortion, the sexual control of women has been an essential feature of patriarchal power.

The sexual regulation of women underlies the formation of classes and is one of the foundations upon which the state rests.

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Harvard Divinity School

Tamar, Qēdēšā, Qadištu, and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia

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TAMAR, QĒDĒŠĀ, QADIŠTU, AND SACRED PROSTITUTION IN MESOPOTAMIA *

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The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet and glittered with gold and jewels and pearls, and she was holding a gold winecup filled with the disgusting filth of her prostitution; on her forehead was written a name, a cryptic name: “Babylon the Great, the mother of the prostitutes and all the filthy practices on the earth.” (Rev 17:4–5, *NJB*)

In discussions of the ancient Near Eastern setting for the Old Testament, various aspects of Mesopotamian society and culture are nominated as the precursors of certain features of Israelite practice. It is particularly in the area of religious thought and ritual that Mesopotamian antecedents are sought. Whether this line of study is a leftover from the period of pan-Babylonianism or not, it has influenced research methodologies both in Assyriology and biblical studies. The particular case in point for the present investigation is the figure of Tamar in Genesis 38, who is designated by the appellatives זונה, “harlot” and קדשה (*qēdēšā*), “holy one.” The latter is the etymological equivalent of the word

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Abbreviations used in this article follow those of *HTR* with the following additions: *ARM* = *Archives royales de Mari* (Paris: Geuthner, 1950–); *KAR* = Erich Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts* (Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 28, 34; Berlin: Hinrichs: 1915–23); *KTU* = M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit* (AOAT 24/1; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1976–); *MRS* = *Mission de Ras Shamra*; *MSL* = *Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon* (Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1937–); *RTC* = François Thureau-Dangin, *Recueil de tablettes chaldéennes* (Paris, 1903); *UET* = *Ur Excavations, Texts* (Publications of the Joint Expedition of the British Museum and the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, to Mesopotamia; London/Philadelphia: Trustees of the Two Museums, 1927–).

qadištu in Akkadian. Both of these terms appear in studies of the subject of sacred prostitution in the Bible and Mesopotamia.¹

TAMAR

In the description of the liaison of Judah and Tamar, Tamar disguised herself so that Judah presumed that she was a "prostitute," a זונה. On two occasions in the story, during the conversation of his friend Hirah the Adullamite and the men of the place, the word קדשה replaces זונה, "prostitute." In the New Jerusalem Bible of 1985, the two words are both translated as "prostitute," but a note on the former states: "Strictly, 'sacred prostitute,' priestess of a pagan cult."² The idea that embedded in the story of Genesis 38 are traces of a tale about a sacred prostitute has a long history. It has been most elaborately developed by Michael Astour.³ However, before such an assumption can be made on the basis of extra-biblical material, let us examine the assumed internal evidence for such a sacred prostitute.

Focusing on Genesis 38, we note that there are layers of perception from the standpoint of the author, redactor, and others, in the story of the deception. Let us first follow the surface story line:

¹Some recent studies on various aspects of this issue include: Daniel Arnaud, "La prostitution sacrée en Mésopotamie, un mythe historique?" *RHR* 183 (1973) 111–15; Michael Astour, "Tamar the Hierodule: An Essay in the Method of Vestigial Motifs," *JBL* 85 (1966) 185–96; Eugene J. Fisher, "Cultic Prostitution in the Ancient Near East? A Reassessment," *BTB* 6 (1976) 225–36; Gerda Lerner, "The Origin of Prostitution in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 11 (1986) 236–54; Robert A. Oden, Jr., *The Bible Without Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) chap. 5: "Religious Identity and the Sacred Prostitution Accusation," 131–53; Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Cultic Prostitution, A Case Study in Cultural Diffusion," in Harry A., Hoffner, Jr., ed., *Orient and Occident: Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday* (AOAT 22; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1973) 213–22.

²*NJB*, 65 note h on Gen 38:21. Other translations include: "harlot" vs. "harlot" (*KJV*); "prostitute" vs. "prostitute" (*Good News Bible* [New York: American Bible Society, 1978]); "harlot" vs. "temple prostitute" (*New American Standard Bible*); "prostitute" vs. "temple prostitute" (*NEB*). The commentators mostly vary their translations: Lee Haines, *Genesis and Exodus* (The Wesleyan Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967): "harlot" vs. "prostitute"; John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (2d ed.; ICC 1; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930): "harlot" vs. "sacred prostitute"; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB 1; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964): "harlot" vs. "votary"; Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977): "harlot" vs. "temple prostitute." A few commentators maintain the traditional translation "harlot" vs. "harlot": Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis, A Commentary* (3d ed.; London: SCM, 1972), and C. A. Simpson and W. R. Bowie, *The Book of Genesis* (The Interpreter's Bible; New York: Abingdon, 1952).

³Astour, "Tamar the Hierodule." Note the criticism of the biblical side of the argument by J. A. Emerton, "Some Problems in Genesis XXXVIII," *VT* 25 (1975) 357–60.

1) changing clothes, taking off the garments of her widowhood

והסר בגדי אלמנותה

2) veiling herself

והכס בצעיף והתעלף

3) sitting at the entrance of Enaim, which is by the way to Timnah

והשב בפתח עינים אשר על דרך חמנתה

This disguise created in Judah's mind a picture of a זונה. Is it because she veiled her face? According to the *communis opinio*, the veiling was the disguise of a common harlot,⁴ or of a harlot whose veiling signified her dedication to Ish-tar, the veiled goddess.⁵ Such an assumption would seem surprising in view of the past and present day Near Eastern custom of veiling as outward symbols of modest women under male control.⁶ Discerning that veils conceal married women, von Rad suggests that Tamar is not playing the harlot but a married woman observing the Babylonian custom described by Herodotus whereby married women had to give themselves once in their lives to strangers.⁷ Consequently, it cannot be the veiling that led Judah to assume that she was a prostitute. However, for the deception to work, she must be covered and unrecognizable. Judah turns towards her הדרך, "to the road." This location must define her social status as prostitute.⁸ Thus, Tamar's stratagem of enticement works and Judah cohabits with her. When he sends his men with her payment, a kid, they question the inhabitants of the town, asking:

איה הקדשה הוא בעינים על הדרך

"Where is the *qēdēšā*, the one by the Enaim road?" It is to be noted that the term קדשה is only mentioned in conversations with the local inhabitants. Let us therefore assume that the term קדשה was known to the inhabitants of Canaan. The prohibition against their existence in the scriptures usually is a good sign of their existence.

⁴Speiser, *Genesis*, 300; Haines, *Genesis and Exodus*, 124; Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985) 82.

⁵Skinner, *Genesis*, 454; Simpson and Bowie, *Genesis*, 760.

⁶Veiling upon marriage in the patriarchal period has been inferred from the fact that Rebecca covered herself with a veil on the approach of Isaac (Gen 24:65) and that Leah was unrecognizable during the marriage ceremony (Gen 29:23). Likewise, according to the legal system, the adulterous woman is punished by the loosening of her hair (Num 5:18). In the New Testament, Paul admonishes the Corinthians that women should choose between cutting off their hair, shaving their heads and wearing a veil to symbolize their subjection to men (1 Cor 11:4–7). For the Islamic world, see *Qurān* Surah XXXIII 53–59; for the Assyrian world, see Middle Assyrian Laws § § 40–41.

⁷Von Rad, *Genesis*, 359.

⁸For a similar opinion see Wawter, *Genesis*, 397.

In the Old Testament, the term קדש (ה) (as rank, title, or profession), literally, “sacred, holy, consecrated one” and commonly translated, “sacred prostitute” (cf. BDB 873), is employed with both men and women in the following contexts: (1) prohibition of their existence (Deut 23:18); (2) the male included in Canaanite religious practices still existing or removed by righteous kings (1 Kgs 14:24; 15:12; 22:47); (3) quarters of male *qēdēšīm*, even within the Temple of Yahweh, in which women are weaving vestments for Asherah (2 Kgs 23:7); (4) condemnation of men who offer sacrifice with *qēdēšôt* (Hos 4:14); and (5) referring to the lives of the impious (Job 36:14). In these contexts, it is impossible to arrive at the conclusion of illicit sexual activity. Likewise, it is contrary to reason to separate the male and female counterparts of the same office in order to deduce that the male was a Canaanite cultic functionary and the female was a irreligious prostitute on the basis that it is a synonym of *zōnā*.⁹ One can conclude that there were male and female cultic functionaries who bore this title at Canaanite local sanctuaries and, at times at least, also the central Israelite temple in Jerusalem. In these passages, there is no explicit evidence that sexual activities were characteristic of the *qadēš/qēdēšā*. Some commentators have suggested that Judah’s friend Hirah attempts to raise the moral tone of the affair by asking for the קדשה rather than a prostitute.¹⁰ If we follow this idea while basing ourselves on the above interpretation, Hirah is not trying to change the nature of the affair from one with a common prostitute to one with a sacred prostitute; rather he is denying the affair and pretending to take the kid to the קדשה for a sacrifice, as in Hos 4:14.

If the ostensible outward behavior of Tamar could be subsumed under this title of female cultic functionary, what had she done to elicit such a response? We know very little of women in cultic roles from the Old Testament.¹¹ On the other hand, it is recognized that the Hebrews saw all forms of religion except their own as depraved and full of debauchery. To the Hebrew author, the pagan priestess must be a harlot, and vice versa, the harlot must have been a pagan priestess.

The Greek translators of the Old Testament evidently had difficulties with the words קדשה and קדש, as is evident from their various translations and nontranslations. Basically, two renditions are found: “prostitute” (male and female) and “initiate” (πόρνη, πορνεύων, and various participial forms based on τελέω, “to finish, to bring to perfection, to initiate into the mysteries”). One translator

⁹Cf. Mayer I. Gruber, “Hebrew *qēdēšāh* and her Canaanite and Akkadian Cognates,” *UF* 18 (1986) 133–48. Gruber is not alone in visualizing the female role without taking into consideration the male counterpart; see references below, n. 11.

¹⁰Speiser, *Genesis*, 300; Haines, *Genesis and Exodus*, 125; see also the *NEB* note on this line.

¹¹Cf. Phyllis Bird, “The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus,” in Paul D. Hanson, Patrick D. Miller, Jr., and S. Dean McBride, eds., *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank M. Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 397–419 and references collected there.

threw up his hands in despair and rendered םִשָׁר in 2 Kgs 23:7 simply as καδησιμ. In Deut 23:18, שָׂר is given both as πορνεύων and τελισκόμενος, and מִשָּׁר as πόρνη and τελεσφόρος, as if the translators would not take the responsibility of choosing between the two possibilities. Of particular interest is Origen's translation of שָׂר in 1 Kgs 22:47 (missing in the LXX): he (or his source) translates εὐδιηλλαγμένος, which means "one changed into something else"—and from the context, a translation "perverse one" seems warranted.

Thus, the confusion of the modern commentators is reflected already in the work of the biblicists of the Greek period. Let us now evaluate the prebiblical and contemporary records of the ancient Near East for the light they can shed on this problem.

NORTH SYRIAN CULTURE AREA

The nearest neighbors to Canaan, not only geographically but also culturally, ethnically, and temporally, are those found in North Syria. In Ugarit, as in the Bible, there are both male and female *qdšm*. Likewise, the *qdšm* are poorly attested. There is at least one example where they appear in ritual texts. In this ritual (*KTU* 1.112 = Ugaritica VII pp. 21–25, RS 24.256), the role of the *qdš* is that of a cantor during sacrifices.¹² The majority of the documentation is limited to administrative texts. There are five instances in which *khn*m (sacerdotal priests) are immediately followed by *qdšm* who usually comprise the same number and are accorded the same privileges. In *UT* 63:3 (= CTA 77), the text only consists of these two groups, *khn*m and *qdšm* who each provide nine persons and one ass. Two of the other instances appear in distribution lists: *UT* 81:2 (= CTA 75) and *UT* 82:2 (= CTA 76). In another instance, the *khn*m and the *qdšm* together furnish one archer for the troops of the city (*UT* 113:73 [= CTA 71]). The last instance seems to be a list of personnel (*UT* 169:7 = 1026:7). On the basis of these examples, von Soden concluded "daß *qdšm* eine Sammelbezeichnung für nicht-priesterliches Tempelpersonal war, das durch eine Weihung dem Tempeldienst verpflichtet wurde."¹³ However, an Akkadian text from Ugarit indicates that rather than through consecration to the deity, the title and status could be acquired through inheritance: "From this day on RN has given a tax exemption to PN and his sons and has given (him) the status of *marjannu* and *ina qadšutti iššīma* he has elevated him from the status of **qadšu*" (*MRS* 6 140ff. RS 16.132:7). Furthermore, from this legal text, we can deduce that the *qdšm* could marry and have children. There is one example

¹²Cf. Paulo Xella, *I testi rituali de Ugarit I* (Studi Semitici 54; Rome: Consiglio Nazionale della Ricerche, 1981) 43–48. Note that in his comment on this line, Xella refers also to sacred prostitution: "Ci pare più plausibile una resa 'consacrato,' senza particolari allusioni alla prostituzione sacra, per cui non vi sono finora tracce nella documentazione ugaritica" (48).

¹³Wolfram von Soden, "Zur Stellung des 'Geweihten' (*qdš*) in Ugarit," *UF* 2 (1970) 329–30.

of the feminine *qdšt* in an Ugaritic clan name which occurs in the alphabetic texts as *bn.qdšt* (UT 400 = CTA 113 v 11; UT 2163:2) and in the Akkadian texts as PN DUMU <*Bin* (= DUMU)>—*qa-diš-ti* (*Ugaritica* 5 11 No. 7:14).¹⁴ Note that the Sumerian logogram NU.GIG (= *qadištu*) is used with the male *qdš*: LÚ.NU.GIG (*MRS* 12 93:26). Their cultic office is difficult to establish and most Ugaritic dictionaries translate “a class of priests.”¹⁵ On the basis of the above evidence, we might venture to speculate that they performed services similar to those that the Levites performed in Israelite worship. Nevertheless, there are scholars who have identified this class as sacred prostitutes.¹⁶ The latest assessment by Jean-Michel de Tarragon has debunked previous arguments: “Or, le dossier de la prostitution sacrée, à Ugarit, est quasi inexistant. Il n’y a pas de témoignages explicites sur cette pratique. . . . Ces hypothèses ne se vérifient pas. Le hiérodule n’est pas attesté à Ugarit.”¹⁷ Unfortunately, though incisive, Tarragon accepts the generalization that sacred prostitution exists outside of Ugarit—in Mesopotamia, Phoenicia, and in the Bible.¹⁸

From the above data, we can infer that *qdš* in the North Syrian culture area referred to a group of people connected with the temple and its cult whose status was inheritable. From the Ugaritic evidence, we speculated that they might perform levitical functions.

MESOPOTAMIAN CULTURE AREA

qadištu

In Akkadian, the language spoken by the Semitic inhabitants of the Mesopotamian plain, the root *qdš* is less common than in the west. It appears most often in the noun form in the feminine *qadištu/qaššatu/qašdatu* and refers to a woman of special status.¹⁹ Unlike the west, there is no trace of a corresponding male **qadšu* (*qašdu* is an adjective only).

The most significant reference in relation to the Tamar story is found in a compendium of legal terminology used in the training of scribes and notaries:²⁰

¹⁴Frauke Gröndahl, *Die Personnamen der Texte aus Ugarit* (Studia Pohl 1; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967) 371 (Abdi-pī-dar_x d. Bin-qadišti), 348 ([bin(?)-qa-diš-ti), 407 (bn qdšt).

¹⁵Cyrus H. Gordon, *UT Gloss.* no. 2210; J. Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch der Ugaritischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1963) no. 2393.

¹⁶Anson F. Rainey, “The Kingdom of Ugarit,” *BA* 28 (1965) 124.

¹⁷Jean-Michel de Tarragon, *Le culte à Ugarit d’après les textes de la pratique en cunéiformes alphabétiques* (Cahiers de la Revue Biblique 19; Paris: Gabalda, 1980) 138–41.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁹For a treatment of the nominal formations, see Dietz Otto Edzard, “Zu den akkadischen Nominalformen parsat-, pirsat- und pursat,” *ZA* 72 (1982) 74–75.

²⁰Published in Benno Landsberger, *Die Serie ana ittišu* (Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon 1; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1937) *Ana ittišu* VII iii 7ff.

egir-bi-ta-àm nu-gig-àm sila-ta ba-an-da-fl-la
 šà-ki-ág-a-ni-ta nam-nu-gig-a-ni in-ne-in-tuk-tuk
 nu-gig-ga-bi dumu-sila-àm mi-ni-in-ri
 ubur-ga-na[m-lú-u_x-lu] in-n[i-. . .]

arkānu qadištum ina sūqim ittaši
ina rāmešu qašdussu ihussu
qadišt[a ši] mārū s[u-qi išši]ma
[tulā ši]zib amēlūti [ušēniqšu]

Afterward he took a *qadištum* in from the street.
 Because of his love for her, he married her even though
 she was a *qadištu*-woman.

This *qadištu*-woman took in a child from the street.
 At the breast with human milk, [she nursed him].

The location of the *qadištu*-woman is the street. This is a legal definition of her status within the sociological structure of Akkadian society, since the street was a place where people not belonging to organized households congregated.²¹ Thus, Arnaud notes that the *social* position of the *qadištu*-woman is hardly different from that of a prostitute.²² In the myth of Enlil and Sud, Enlil mistakes her for a prostitute since she is standing in the street.²³ Consequently, Tamar pretended to be a prostitute standing in the street but could also be mistaken for a *qadištu*-woman in that location.

It still remains for us to define the function of the *qadištu*-woman. When approaching Mesopotamian data, one should evaluate them by period and area. Religious symbols and titles undergo change continually in a complex fashion by which older elements are replaced in time by newer ones or persist but are reinterpreted to fit into a new total system of meanings.

In the Old Babylonian legal system, the *qadištu*-woman appears together with other classes of women regulated by the codes: the *nadītu*, *kulmašītu*, *ugbaltu* were women who were organized into special groups, each having a special relationship to a male deity, and whose sexuality was controlled by celibacy or marriage. These classes were opposed to the classes of women not regulated by the codes: the *ḥarimtu*, *šamḫatu*, and *kezertu* who had a special relationship to a female deity and whose sexuality was unregulated.²⁴

²¹CAD s.v. *sūqu*.

²²Arnaud, "La prostitution sacrée," 114.

²³Miguel Civil, "Enlil and Ninlil: The Marriage of Sud," *JAOS* 103 (1983) 43–64.

²⁴Given the present state of our knowledge, we can adduce that the first two titles are of professions related to secular prostitution and brothels whose patroness was the goddess Inanna (see Gruber, "Hebrew *qēdēšāh*," 146), whereas the *kezertu* was linked to the cult of various goddesses whose service obligations may have included some sexual activities. For preliminary studies of the last, see Jacob J. Finkelstein, "Introduction," *Late Old Babylonian Documents and Letters* (Yale Oriental Series 13; New Haven/London: Yale University Press 1972) 10–11; Maureen Gallery,

The function of the *qadištu*-woman is vague because of the nature of the documentary sources.²⁵ According to Old Babylonian legal texts, the *qadištu* could own property, she could marry, have children, and nurse children of others. In Nippur, from the Isin-Larsa period, there are occurrences of more than one nu-gig (= *qadištu*) at the same time and a certain Inbatum has her own domicile and personal household.²⁶ Moreover, it seems likely that the deliveries of sheep to Inbatum were intended for sacrifices for the success of an expedition to Nawar, although there is no explicit reference to such a sacrifice.²⁷ At the same time, in the city of Larsa, King Sin-iddinam represents his enemies as so uncouth that they do not install *qadištu*-women in the place of the gods.²⁸ Further, the *qadištu*-woman appears on state ration lists. *Qaššatu*, a Mari by-form to *qadištu*, occurs in two very interesting texts, ARM 9 291, and 23 296, apparent census of women in different localities, designated either as *amat* PN, "servant of PN," *almattum*, "widow," or as *qadištu*-woman. The first group of women are under the control and authority of a man with one exception—a woman under the authority of a *qadištu*-woman. The second and third groups are those apparently under their own control and authority.

From Old Babylonian literary texts, there is a very interesting passage in Atra-ḥasis, the Babylonian story of the creation of man, also known as the Babylonian Flood story: *ša[b]sūtum ina bīt qadišti liḥdu ali alittum ulladu*, "let the midwife rejoice in the house of the *qadištu*-woman where the pregnant wife gives birth."²⁹ Apparently, the *qadištu*-woman lived alone in a special hut where she presided over childbirth and wet-nursing. Perhaps, while the midwife tended to the physical needs of the woman in childbirth, the *qadištu* presided over the spiritual requirements of the birthing.

"Service Obligations of the *kezertu*-Women," *Or* 49 (1980) 333–38; K. van Lerberghe, *New Data from the Archives Found in the House of Ur-Utu at Tell ed-Dēr* (AfO.Beih. 19; 1982) 280–83. Note their importance in the court of Yasmah-Addu of Mari: see Jean-Marie Durand, "Les dames du palais de Mari," *Mari Annales de Recherches Interdisciplinaires* 4 (1985) 390–91.

²⁵For a review of the evidence, see Johannes Renger, "Untersuchungen zum Priestertum in der altbabylonischen Zeit," *ZA* 58 (1967) 179–84; for Sippar see Rivkah Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1975) 328–31.

²⁶John F. Robertson, "The Internal Political and Economic Structure of Old Babylonian Nippur," *JCS* 36 (1984) 157, 159.

²⁷John F. Robertson, "Redistributive Economics in Ancient Mesopotamian Society: A Case Study from Isin-Larsa Period Nippur" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1981) 216–17.

²⁸William W. Hallo, "The Royal Correspondence of Larsa. II. The Appeal to UTU," *Zikir Šumim, Assyriological Studies Presented to F. R. Kraus on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Leiden: Brill, 1982) 107–24.

²⁹W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-ḥasis, the Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969) 62 I 290.

In some rare occurrences, she is designated as a votary of the god Adad in Kish and Sippar and of the goddess Annunītu in Mari. Although his divine persona is usually depicted as temperamental, the god of thunderstorms and lightning who holds back the fructifying rain in his anger, Adad is also known as the god of divination and the brother of Bēlet-ilī, the goddess of childbirth. In the one extant Old Babylonian hymn to Adad, he is called the hearer of prayers. In the literary composition entitled "The Contest between the Tamarisk and the Palm," the Palm entreats: *alkī i nillika anāku u <ka>ši ana āl Kiši . . . qadištu mē is[sariq]ma [. . .]ilaqqima idallalūma ippašū isinna*, "Come, let us go, I and you, to the city of Kish. . . . After the *qadištu*-woman has sprinkled water, she takes [. . .] and they worship and hold a festival."³⁰ This text may demonstrate that the *qadištu*-woman did have a ritual function, perhaps in a purification ceremony in Old Babylonian Kish. Found in Sippar is a letter regarding the seals of the goddess Ištar, the queen of Sippar, which seem to be in the possession of a *qadištu*-woman.³¹

Later Babylonian texts contain few references to the *qadištu*-woman. In one Middle Babylonian text she appears as a mother,³² and in one Standard Babylonian literary text she appears also in connection with childbirth:³³ *nadātu ša ina nēmeqi uballaṭa rēmu qašdātu ša ina mē tēlilti [išak]kanū*, "the *nadītus* who with skill heal the foetus, the *qadištus* who with water [per]form purifications." On the other hand, in Standard Babylonian texts the *qadištu*-woman is often counted among sorceresses and witches.³⁴ The latter instances can be accounted for by the first-millennium dualistic theory that women were either "good" or "bad": because the latter were under their own control, they were considered to be the mediums of evil power, a dangerous, uncontrolled female power. Another interpretation is that the *qadištu*-woman officiated in exorcistic rituals in which she impersonated the witch "providing a tangible object for exorcistic activity, whereas her accessories, the palm fibre mat and fir

³⁰W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960) 161 rev. 5–8.

³¹Van Lerberghe, "New Data," 280.

³²Albert T. Clay, *Documents from the Temple Archives of Nippur Dated in the Reigns of Cassite Rulers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, the Museum Publications of the Babylonian Section, 1912) 122.22.

³³KAR 321.7; see Gruber, "Hebrew *qēdēšāh*," 141.

³⁴Gerhard Meier, *Die assyrischen Beschwörungen Maqlū* (AfO.Beih. 2; Berlin, 1937) Tablette III 40–55, V 51–60, VI 26–31 = 37–42; Erica Reiner, *Šurpu, A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations* (AfO.Beih. 11; Graz, 1958) Tablette III 116–17, VIII 69; cf. Sue Rollin, "Women and Witchcraft in Ancient Assyria," in Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt, eds., *Images of Women in Antiquity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983) 34–45.

cone, probably symbolized the 'bonds' of the sorcerers and were to be broken or unraveled in the course of the ceremonies.'³⁵

In Assyria, the *qadištu*-woman appears in letters, legal texts, and ritual texts from the Old Assyrian period onwards.³⁶ From the testimony of these texts, we can establish that the *qadištu*-woman could marry and, if she were married, she was allowed to be veiled in public (Ass. Code § 40). There were dire penalties if an unmarried *qadištu*-woman went veiled in public. Thus, Tamar could have been considered by the Canaanite inhabitants as a veiled, married *qadištu*-woman. As in the Babylonian sources, the *qadištu*-woman is mentioned beside the midwife.³⁷

In Middle Assyrian ritual texts, the *qadištu*-woman officiated in the Adad cult in Assur. In one text (KAR 154), the *qadištu*-women conduct the ritual performances together with the SANGA-priest. The ritual is described thus: on the day that they . . . Adad and they let the *qadištu*-women go out (of the temple), they make a meal offering in the Temple of Adad, the *qadištu*-women intone the *inhu*-chant, prolong the *inhu*-chant, the SANGA performs a purification ceremony, the *qadištu*-women raise the (statue of the) god, the SANGA and the *qadištu*-women depart from the temple of Adad. Then, the procession continues to various other temples, and the same activities are repeated. During these rituals, the *qadištu*-women wear certain jewels. Furthermore, the *qadištu*-women partake of the sacrificial offering.³⁸

In Neo-Assyrian texts, there are two obscure references to a *qadištu*-woman in ritual function. The first is an Assyrian ritual requiring her use of salt to undo a lightheartedly sworn oath.³⁹ The other is contained in a letter referring to a *qadištu*-woman's involvement with the vestments of the god Shamash.⁴⁰

Thus, the *qadištu*-woman may have had more than one function during the diachronic span of Mesopotamian culture. One was identified with a gender-specific female activity such as the task of procreation and nurture. Contrary to the North Syrian socio-cultural system, the Mesopotamian has gender-differentiated ecclesiastical role specialization. Another function of the

³⁵Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal* (AOAT 5/2; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1983) 183.

³⁶Hans Hirsch, *Untersuchungen zur altassyrischen Religion* (AfO.Beih. 13/14; Osnabrück: Biblio-Verlag, 1972) 58; Brigitte Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* (Studia Pohl, Series Maior 10; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1981) 262.

³⁷For the Middle Assyrian harem decrees, cf. *AfO* 17, 268.11; Wolfram von Soden, "Die Hebamme in Babylonien und Assyrien," *AfO* 18 (1957/58) 119–21.

³⁸For a treatment of this text, see Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel*, 2. T2–T4.

³⁹Erich Ebeling, *Parfümrezepte und kultische Texte aus Assur* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1950) Pl. 17 r. ii 5; see Ebeling, "Kultische Texte aus Assur," *Or* n.s. 22 (1953) 43.

⁴⁰Robert Francis Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collection of the British Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1892–1914) no. 1126:13; see Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars*, no. 187.

qadištu-woman was a sacerdotal service performed in the cult of Adad located in the cities of Assur and Kish. Her ritual duties were many and laid out in various fragmentary texts. In addition, in the first millennium, she may have officiated in exorcistic rituals.

nu-gig

Mesopotamian culture had its formative period in the third millennium when Sumerian was the most important language of communication. In Sumerian, the lexical equivalent for *qadištu*-woman is *nu-gig*. Not only does this term occur in relation to the status of women but also appears as an epithet in describing the goddesses Inanna, Aruru/Ninmah, Nanaja, and Nini(n)sina.⁴¹ The latter usage has been exploited to assert the definition of “sacred prostitute” for the three terms *qēdēšā*, *qadištu*, and *nu-gig*:

D’après les textes, la sumérienne *nu-gig* (= accadien *qadištu*) ne semble pas avoir été consacrée à une divinité particulière. Mais il ne fait pas de doute qu’elle remplit au temple la fonction d’une prostituée sacrée. Cela ne ressort pas seulement de la relation étymologique *qadištu* = *qēdēša* (hiérodoule dans la religion cananéenne), mais surtout du fait qu’Ištar elle-même est décrite comme la *qadištu* des dieux.⁴²

Translations of *nu-gig* vary. In order of frequency, *nu-gig* has been rendered: (a) “hierodule,” “cult prostitute,”⁴³ (b) “holy one,” “sacred,” “tabooed woman,”⁴⁴ (c) “Gottgeweihte,”⁴⁵ (d) “interdicted womb,”⁴⁶ or (e) untrans-

⁴¹See the references collected in Dietz Otto Edzard, “Sumerische Komposita mit dem ‘Nominalpräfix’ nu-,” ZA 55 (1963) 104ff.; Adam Falkenstein, “Sumerische religiöse Texte,” ZA 56 (1964) 118ff.; Willem H. P. Römer, *Sumerische ‘Königshymnen’ der Isin-Zeit* (Leiden: Brill, 1965) 150, 152; William W. Hallo and Johannes J. A. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1968) 87; Åke W. Sjöberg, *The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns* (Texts from Cuneiform Sources 3; Locust Valley, NY: Augustin, 1969) 123.

⁴²Walter Kornfeld, “Prostitution sacrée,” DBSup 8 (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1972) 1360.

⁴³Falkenstein, “Sumerische religiöse Texte,” 120; Raymond R. Jestin, “Les noms de profession en NU-,” in *Symbolae Biblicae et Mesopotamicae F. M. Th. de Liagre Böhl Dedicatae* (Leiden: Brill, 1973) 212; von Soden, *AHW* 399; Römer, *AOAT* 1. 295; Samuel N. Kramer, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 107 (1963) 494:37 (“my wife who is a hierodule”); Daniel Reisman, *JCS* 25 186:2 and passim; Hallo and van Dijk, *Exaltation of Inanna*, 87 (“civil state of Inanna in the Sumerian Pantheon”); Jerrold S. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983) 61:241.

⁴⁴CAD 1/J 270 s.v. *ištaritu*; Landsberger, *Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon* IV (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1956) 17, 78–79; Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once—Sumerian Poetry in Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) 6 n. 9.

⁴⁵Römer, *Königshymnen*, 136:2 and passim.

⁴⁶Astour, “Tamar the Hierodule,” 189.

lated.⁴⁷ These translations are manifestly based on context or on the Akkadian translation. The popular translation “hierodule” has been hallowed by tradition and is applied even in passages where it patently does not make sense, such as the “Curse over Agade”:⁴⁸

(gods curse Agade)
 (may the cattle slaughterer slaughter his wife)
 (may your sheep butcher butcher his child)
 (may your pauper drown the child who seeks money from him!)
 (may your prostitute hang herself at the entrance to her brothel)
 ama nu-gig-zu ama nu-bar-zu dumu he-en-gi₄-gi₄
 may your *cult prostitute* and *hierodules* who are mothers, kill their children!

Scholars define Inanna as a goddess of sexuality and use the Greek word “hierodule” to denote a “sacred prostitute” although to the Greeks, ἱεροδοῦλος meant literally “sacred slave.” The word hierodule, which has connotations associated with the Greek culture, is irrelevant and inapplicable to the definition of the term nu-gig, originating in a different ethos, culture, and era. Note that the epithet nu-gig is used especially when speaking of Inanna as a mother: ama nu-gig.

The lexical explication for nu-gig is difficult. From the etymological evidence of its elements, nu + noun, the meaning of the compound is not evident. The asyntactical construction of nu + noun forms mainly terms of professions. The exact character of /nu/ is not obvious; it has been suggested that it is a phonetic variant of lú, “man,” or a sort of pronominal prefix.⁴⁹ Basing his theory on the CAD article *ištarītu* (CAD I/J 271), which in turn relies on Landsberger (*MSL* 1 146–47), Astour maintained that nu was to be understood as “sexual organs.”⁵⁰ This meaning has now been shown to be incorrect.⁵¹ The

⁴⁷Edzard, “Sumerische Komposita,” 104; Sjöberg, *Temple Hymns*, 36:320; Adele Berlin, *Enmerkar and Ensuĕkešdanna: A Sumerian Narrative Poem* (Occasional Publications of the Babylonian Fund 2; Philadelphia: The University Museum, 1979) 45:97.

⁴⁸Cooper, *Curse of Agade*, 60.441; see also translations of Pierre Attinger, “Remarques à propos de la ‘Malédiction d’Accad,’” *RA* 78 (1984) 106: “puissent ta hiérodoule (devenue) mère, ta courtisane (devenue) mère faire avorter (son)/ son enfant!”; Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once*, 372: “May your hierodule who is a mother, and your courtesan who is a mother stab the child!”

⁴⁹Edzard, “Sumerische Komposita,” 91–102. Note his reluctance to state the etymology, linguistic structure, and semantics of this compound. See also Jestin, “Les noms de profession,” 211–13.

⁵⁰Astour, “Tamar the Hierodule,” 189 n. 28.

⁵¹Published after Astour’s article, CAD 9. 199 s.v. *lipištu* (written UZU).NU in Akkadian texts) is translated as “an abnormal fleshy or membranous substance,” not a sexual organ.

second element is the noun *gig*, “disease, contagion.”⁵² The element *gig* also occurs in the compound *nì-gig*, “taboo, sacrosanct, sacred (to the gods), forbidden (to men),” which entered into Akkadian as a loanword *ikkibu* from the eme-sal form of the Sumerian, *èm-gèb*. Thus, the compound *nu + gig* means “one who is taboo, sacrosanct.” Although Akkadian employs two unrelated lexemes *ikkibu* and *qadištu* for the act and the object which is taboo and the person who is taboo, the earliest evidence from the west at Ebla uses the related lexeme *qadišum* for the act and the object, *nì-gig*.⁵³

The office *nu-gig* appears in lexical texts together with the same classes of women as in the Old Babylonian legal codes. In administrative documents, the *nu-gig* appears in Fara texts. An important clue to her status in the socio-political hierarchy is a cylinder seal impression U.13607, found at Ur, which is inscribed with the titles of one of the earliest kings of that city: Mesanepada, King of Kish, dam *nu-gig*. The latter can be translated either as “spouse of *Nu-gig*” or “spouse of the *nugig*-priestess.”⁵⁴ Jerrold Cooper states that “this most probably refers to the ritual coupling of the king and the goddess impersonated by a priestess which centuries later is known to have taken place at the New Year Festival. Or, *Nugig* could simply be the name of a wife of Mesanepada.”⁵⁵ This view that the *nu-gig* priestess represented Inanna in the sacred marriage rite agrees with that of Johannes Renger, who deduced from the contextual evidence that *nu-gig* is an epithet of Inanna.⁵⁶ Further indication of her high position in Ur in Neo-Sumerian times is a seal impression of her scribe on a tablet from Ur: *Nin-kinda^{da} nu-gig-gal ur^{ki}-ma Lugal-ḥa-ma-ti dub-sar arad-zu* “Nin-kinda, the chief *nu-gig* of Ur, Lugal-ḥamati the scribe, your servant.” In this inscription, she is related to the city but not to any specific deity. With this limited information, we cannot ascertain any particularities of the role of the *nu-gig* in Ur. We can conclude that there were several of them and they were organized hierarchically, like any other profession.

⁵²It is not possible that *gig* stands here for *mí + nunuz*, which appears as part of the title of the en-priestess of Nanna of Ur (cf. Edmond Sollberger, “Notes on the Early Inscriptions from Ur and El-‘Obēd,” *Iraq* 22 (1960) 86 n. 22; Jestin, “Les noms de profession,” 212) because of syllabic renderings as well as the Emesal *mugib*. Likewise, it is not probable that the *nu-* prefix is a phonetic indicator.

⁵³Giovanni Pettinato, *Testi lessicali bilingui della biblioteca L. 2769* (Materiali Epigrafici de Ebla 4; Naples, 1982) 207:100; cf. Manfred Krebernik, “Zu Syllabar und Orthographie der lexikalischen Texte aus Ebla,” *ZA* 73 (1983) 4.

⁵⁴U.13607 = Woolley, *Ur Excavations II* (London/Philadelphia, 1934) 207 no. 214 = Pl. 191 (inscription), description 312–13, 352, 588 = Legrain, *Ur Excavations III* (London/Philadelphia, 1936) Pl. 30 no. 518 = Pl. 57 no. 518.

⁵⁵Jerrold S. Cooper, *Sumerian and Akkadian Royal Inscriptions*, vol. 1: *Presargonic Inscriptions* (American Oriental Society Translation Series 1; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1986) 98, Ur 5.3.

⁵⁶J. Renger, “Heilige Hochzeit,” *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975) 256a.

In pre-Sargonic Lagash, the nu-gig appears in ration lists with important members of society, married to men in high position.⁵⁷ From later neo-Sumerian Lagash, we have mention of a nu-gig-gal, a chief nu-gig.⁵⁸

For Umma we have both administrative documentation and literary allusions. From Old Akkadian Umma, there are references to two persons practicing this profession: Íd-ĥe-nun, the nu-gig, and Al-la, the nu-gig of the nigin, the birthing place.⁵⁹ In the hymn to the temple of Šara in Umma, Šara the beloved son of Inanna, is the dumu-nun-na nu-gig-ga, "the princely son of the nu-gig."⁶⁰ Putting these two types of documentation together we might deduce that it was Šara, patron god of Umma in whose cult the nu-gig priestesses may have taken part.

In the temple hymn to Inanna of Zabalam, she is not only described as the nu-gig, but also her temple is described as clad in the jewels of the nu-gig and designated the nigin-gar, a sacred room, possibly the sacred birthing place.⁶¹ The juxtaposition of the epithet nu-gig and the sacred nigin-gar occurs in the temple hymns to Inanna of Akkade (line 513) and to Nini(n)sina of Isin (lines 387–88). Furthermore, the role of nu-gig was one of the *mes*, the divine gifts of civilization to man; while *me* number 49 is nu-gig-an-na, *me* number 47 is nigin-gar, the sacred birthing place (separated by an unknown *me*).⁶²

In Sumerian literary texts, the nu-gig seems to play a role in fertility and childbirth. In hymns to goddesses, scholars have been puzzled by the "hierodule" epithet in descriptions of goddesses in relation to childbirth. A good example of the activities assigned to the position of the "hierodule" is contained in the hymn to Nini(n)sina, a goddess known as the healer and midwife.⁶³

⁵⁷Julia M. Asher-Greve, *Frauen in altsumerischer Zeit* (Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 18; Malibu: Undena, 1985) 158.

⁵⁸François Thureau-Dangin, *Receuil de tablettes chaldéennes* (Paris, 1903) no. 208 r.2 (Urnigirsu 5).

⁵⁹Benjamin Foster, "Ethnicity and Onomastics in Sargonic Mesopotamia," *Or* 51 (1982) 317 (Íd-ĥe-nun nu-gig), 324 (Al-la nu-gig nigin).

⁶⁰Sjöberg, *Temple Hymns*, 1. 309.

⁶¹For a discussion of the word nigin-gar, lit. "House in which the foetus lies," see Sjöberg, *Temple Hymns*, 92–93; Römer, *AOAT* 1, 296; Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once*, 475: "Niginġar was a temple which served as a cemetery for stillborn or premature babies and as a depository for afterbirths."

⁶²Gertrud Farber-Flügge, *Der Mythos "Inanna und Enki" unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Liste der me* (Studia Pohl 10; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1973) 109.

⁶³Edward Chiera, *Sumerian Religious Texts* (Upland, PA, 1924) no. 6 rev. iii 1–8 = 7.11–19; see W. H. Ph. Römer, "Einige Beobachtungen zur Göttin Nini(n)sina," *Lišan Miṭḥurti* (AOAT 1; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1969) 295, lines 74–82.

šár ki-sikila li-li gá-gá-dè
 uzu.silà-gar-ra-ke₄ si-sá-e-dè gi-dur ku₅-dè nam-tar-re-dè
 ǵi₈ig-nigìn-gar-ra-ke₄ ki-ús-ù-dè dub-ki-ra-ra-dè
 dumu-lú úr-ra da an-ri-ri gù-nun-sù-sù-dè
 šà ki-šè gá-gá-dè sag šu-bal-aka-dè
 nam-nu-u₃-gig ZI.KI.IN-dè en tukun-di-dè ní-di-iš(!?) e-dè
 me-gal-gal-e pa-è ù-bí-aka
 nin-mu me-te(!?)-si na-an-ga-àm-du₁₁
 𒀭nin-in-si-na-ke₄ di zi-dè-eš na-e

For the thousands of young maidens, to establish fertility,
 to regulate the womb, to cut the umbilical cord, to determine the fates,
 to support the door of the Nigin-gar, to let the fetus come to a successful
 completion,
 a child of man, protected in the loins, to let cry aloud,
 to set the womb on the earth, to turn around the head,
 to perform(?) the nu-gig-ship, the act quickly, to sing proper praise,
 when she has made manifest the great *mes*,
 and my Lady, has spoken the hymn of praise,
 Nini(n)sina fittingly praise yourself!

Note also the appellative *ama nu-gig*, “Mother nu-gig,” referring to Nini(n)sina in the Temple Hymn to Nini(n)sina of Isin (line 387), who maintains the *nigìn-gar* of the holy place (line 388). Thus, we can establish that the activities of the *nu-gig* are related to birthing. Further evidence can be seen in the story of the Marriage of Sud: in the blessing of Sud, she is endowed with the name Nintu lady of birthing whose responsibilities include: [nam(?)]-n]u-gig-ga ní-g-nam munus-e-ne lú igi nu-bar-re-dam, “the functions of the nu-gig, everything pertaining to women that no man must see.”⁶⁴ Apparently, childbirth rites were solely women’s rites at which men were not welcome. Moreover, this allusion to secret women’s rites, an unexpected revelation of the Mesopotamian culture pattern, reflects systemization of male and female activity in pre-industrial and non-Western societies; and it is familiar in cross-cultural perspective which recognizes gender differentiation as a universal phenomenon in the structuring of social roles, responsibilities, and values.

On the basis of these conclusions, we might retranslate the “Curse of Agade” line 241 (above): “May your birthing women who are mothers and your nu-bar women who are mothers kill (or abort) children!” Thus, a horrifying picture is drawn with a stark contrast—women who help children to be born will now kill children.

⁶⁴Civil, “Enlil and Ninlil,” line 154.

An additional characteristic of the nu-gig besides wearing jewelry and head-dresses is her apparent shouting or screeching.⁶⁵ Whether the screeching refers to sympathetic labor pains or some other cultic, cacophonous performance, is difficult to ascertain. This shouting is based on the following sources:⁶⁶

(1)

(Aruru. the sister of Enlil
offered me her right breast, offered me her left breast
when I had gone up to the temple)
nu-gig-e anzu.mušen-amar-ra-gin₇ ur₅ m[u-ša₄]
the nu-gig-priestess scree[ched] like an Anzu-bird of young ones
(to repeat, when I had gone up there,
even though she is not a young duck, she shriek[ed] (like one))

(2)

nu-gig-ge anzu.mušen-amar-ra-gin_x
the nu-gig (is to me) as an Anzu-bird of young ones

(3)

ka-bé nu-gig-gin₇ an-ša-ga gù mu-un-dúb-dúb-bé
his mouth roars against heaven like the nu-gig priestess.

To sum up the Sumerian picture of the nu-gig, she could be married and have children. Beyond her personal life, she performed a public service by taking part in women's rites related to birthing. When the epithet nu-gig is used in reference to the goddesses, it describes them in their nurturing and procreative roles. There is as yet no evidence of a Sumerian clerical office of a nu-gig.

SACRED PROSTITUTION IN MESOPOTAMIA⁶⁷

Having proved that neither the קדשה nor the *qadištu* nor the nu-gig are to be reckoned as sacred prostitutes, it remains necessary to prove that there was no such institution as sacred prostitution in Mesopotamia in spite of its widespread reputation among scholars, to which I would like to return in the conclusion.

⁶⁵Berlin, *Enmerkar and Ensuĥkešdanna*, 74.

⁶⁶The three sources are: (1) *Enmerkar and Ensuĥkešdanna*, line 97, (2) *Lugalbanda and Enmerkar*, line 315 = 381, (3) *Bird and Fish*, line 117 var.

⁶⁷The geographical area covered by the term Mesopotamia includes the land between the two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, and is divided into two geopolitical regions: Babylonia is the alluvial plain of the south and Assyria is situated on the highlands to the north. Evidence from the peripheral areas surrounding Mesopotamia will not be considered in the following since those areas belong to the Hittite, Neo-Hittite, or Hurrian culture areas.

Their investigations are tainted by certain perceptions. Their primary problems concern their epistemological approaches and historical methodologies. First is the unproven assertion of this institution. For example, Astour states that "Babylonia [was] the classical land of sacral prostitution. . . . Sacral prostitution existed in Israel and Judah until the implementation of the religious reforms of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C."⁶⁸ This fallacy is repeated *ad nauseam* in many general discussions of sacred prostitution. In 1987, the *Encyclopedia of Religion* entry for "hierodouleia" comments:

Contemporary scholarship uses the expression *sacred prostitution* to refer to a sexual rite practiced in the ancient Near East. In the temples of Ishtar, Astarte, Mā, Anāhitā, and Aphrodite, for example, women, often virgins, offered themselves sexually to strangers. Sometimes the temples were staffed by such "sacred prostitutes."⁶⁹

Such allegations first appear in the work of Herodotus (*Hist.* 1.199) whose view of Mesopotamian culture was considerably biased and whose speculations have been elaborated by Strabo in his *Geography* (16.1.20), and by other classical authors. Of the scholars cited above in note one, a majority have investigated this source and have realized it was the only source for claiming sacred prostitution, and discarded it on these grounds.⁷⁰

When scholars discuss an institution without any attempt to define it, we must conclude that their methodology is questionable. The term "sacred prostitution" is employed for any sexual practice within the "sacred sphere"; the sacred prostitute can be a priestess who participated in a "sacred marriage,"⁷¹ a laywoman, such as Herodotus's Babylonian woman, who once in her life has to offer herself to a stranger for money in the temple of Aphrodite,⁷² a priestess whose caring for the gods included offering them sexual services,⁷³ or a laywoman who participated in organized, ritual sexual activities.⁷⁴ It is obvious that a definition of terms is mandatory. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "prostitution" is "the action of prostituting or condition of being prostituted . . . the offering of the body to indiscriminate lewdness for hire," from late Latin *prostituere*, "to place before, to expose publicly, offer for sale, to act as a

⁶⁸Astour, "Tamar the Hierodule," 185.

⁶⁹Frédérique Apffel Marglin, "Hierodouleia," in Mircea Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion* (16 vols.; New York: MacMillan, 1987) 6. 309.

⁷⁰The best discussion is that of Oden, *Bible Without Theology*, but note also Arnaud, "La prostitution sacrée," and Fisher, "Cultic Prostitution."

⁷¹Yamauchi, "Cultic Prostitution," 213.

⁷²Oden, *Bible Without Theology*, 140–47.

⁷³Lerner, "Origin of Prostitution," 239.

⁷⁴Fisher, "Cultic Prostitution," 230: "whole-scale debauchery connoted by the term cultic prostitution."

prostitute.”⁷⁵ “Sacred prostitution” would, therefore, be the act of offering the body to indiscriminate lewdness for hire in the sacred sphere, ritual, or place. None of the above scholarly definitions fits this definition with the exception of that originating with Herodotus! For these reasons, some writers, such as Fisher and Lerner, differentiate “cultic sexual service” from “commercial prostitution”; the former discriminating and without payment, and the latter indiscriminate and with payment.

For Mesopotamia, we have clear and explicit evidence of the profitable profession of the prostitute, the *ḥarimtu*. Her place of work is usually the tavern. Inanna and Ishtar both act as patroness of the tavern and its inhabitants. The profession of prostitution is designated *ḥarimūtu*. However, in the city of Sippar in the Old Babylonian period, this status and its prerogatives are held by men as well as women, husbands as well as wives.⁷⁶ These prerogatives are designated as those of a goddess; but whether it can be inferred from this statement that there is any relationship to the temple and its cult is impossible to determine from the evidence. From economic texts, we could conclude that silver may have been exchanged during the fulfillment of these prerogatives or from the sale of these offices as any other office. Because of the dearth of information concerning the status of *ḥarimūtu* and our lack of knowledge concerning the temple’s part in the regulation of the tavern/brothel and the prostitutes that congregated there, it might be better to give a more generalized definition of “prostitution” in Mesopotamia. Consequently, I would suggest that a “prostitute” is one who is outside the culturally defined bounds of controlled sexuality.

If prostitution is defined as occurring outside the cultural bounds of controlled sexuality, then controlled coitus within the sacred sphere is not prostitution. The existence of the so-called sacred marriage ritual during which ritual intercourse seems to have been performed once a year during the New Year’s festival in the latter half of the third millennium and the beginning of the second millennium as symbolic of the union of the divine and human realms does not indicate any ritual promiscuity. Any cult-related sexual activity simply does not exist outside of sacred marriage rites. Arnaud supposes that the misconception of sacred prostitution arose through the confusion which existed because the lines between sacred sphere and secular sphere were not always kept, and that the temples included underlings of doubtful morality with close ties to groups at the edges of society. Thus, he maintains that prostitution was a frequent activity without the temple collecting any revenue from it.⁷⁷

⁷⁵OED 8. 1497.

⁷⁶Van Lerberghe, “New Data,” 280–83.

⁷⁷Arnaud, “La prostitution sacrée,” 114.

In addition to the methodological issues, there are factual inaccuracies abiding in the secondary studies based on dated Assyriological treatments of pertinent information. It is unfortunate that scholars who have been interested in this problem lack access to the original sources. Much confusion has arisen over misunderstood words.

There are two approaches to the question of the existence of sacred prostitution. The first is the argument from silence: there are no legal regulations, administrative documents, or any other record of such a practice. In the absence of positive evidence, the second approach analyzes the negative evidence against sexual activities within the sacred sphere. Testimony comes from prohibitions and the dire fates which will befall those who commit such transgressions.⁷⁸ The words, "if he ate unwittingly what is taboo to his god, if he had intercourse with the priestess of his god . . .," appear in the confessionals of a penitent sinner.⁷⁹ Sexual offences and the trespassing of sancta are linked in that they are both sins committed against the property of the gods. For the exorcist, there exist diagnostic omens explicating the reasons for the medical predicaments of the patient: "The embraces given to the *ēntu* priestess are discovered by a way of association when a man's tongue is tied and he cannot speak. Sexual intercourse with a priestess provokes a swollen epigastrium, a feverish abdomen, diseases of the testicles and a scaly penis."⁸⁰

Thus the issue of sacred prostitution comes down to the accuracy of Herodotus, and much doubt has been cast on his statements.⁸¹ Arnaud has attempted to trace the origins of Herodotus's statements. He blames the Mesopotamian scribes for misunderstanding their own traditions. According to Arnaud, those traditions concerned past important cultic functions attributed to women, while the contemporary first-millennium women were relegated to performing household tasks or were prostitutes hanging around the temple precinct, especially in the Aramaized cult of Ištar/Inanna of Uruk. The scribes could have speculated upon the debased venal cult, and their speculations could have resulted in the cultic prostitution fiction given to Herodotus.⁸² Thus, this chapter in the annals of historical research, whereby a generalization derived from an ancient fiction coupled with the projection of a modern ideology of women onto historical data becomes fact in scholarly discourse, can now be deleted. "Sacred prostitution" is an amalgam of misconceptions, presuppositions, and inaccuracies.

⁷⁸Karel van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia: A Comparative Study* (Assen/Maastricht: van Gorcum, 1985) 79.

⁷⁹E. Riener, "Lipšur Litanies," *JNES* 15 (1956) 137 line 84.

⁸⁰Van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 79.

⁸¹Otto E. Ravn, *Herodotus' Description of Babylon* (Copenhagen: Arnold Busck, 1942); William Baumgartner, "Herodots babylonische und assyrische Nachrichten," *Archiv Orientalní* 18 (1950) 69–106.

⁸²Arnaud, "La prostitution sacrée," 115.

THE RENOWN AND REPUTE OF BABYLON

Although in all the articles and discussions concerning cultic prostitution the preeminence of Babylon as the “mother of harlots” is never mentioned; it is an unarticulated assumption underlying their arguments. This popular identification of harlotry with Babylon appears to stem from Revelation, a widely read and quoted book in our Western Christianized civilization, a quotation from which opens this article. The persistence of such views to the present is illustrated in this graphic depiction of Babylon by Joan Oates:

So wrote a New Testament prophet, and, although the allusion was to Rome, the sentiment accurately expressed the ancient world’s view of Babylon. Today, 2000 years after the city was “cast down and found no more,” the name still conjures up in our minds a vision of opulence and splendour stained with the smear of pagan decadence so enthusiastically applied by the writers of the Hebrew world.⁸³

This common misconception arose because of the lack of awareness that the reference—as Joan Oates seems to realize—is of Hebraic origin and alludes exclusively to the practices of then-existing, decadent Rome and not to those of a Babylon of an earlier period. The authentic Greek view of Babylon, though running parallel to that of Revelation, is found typically in the words of older writers such as Herodotus, and reflects their derogatory perception of women and barbarians.

The truly Hebraic or Judean view toward ancient Babylon in the world of the Old Testament is revealed through numerous references to Babylon, both in the historical and in the literary texts. The most elaborate portrayal is given in the description of the fall of Babylon in Deutero-Isaiah, whose people lived closer in time, in territory, and in kinship to those of Babylonia. There Babylon is distinguished by the epithet *בתולה בבל*, “the virgin daughter of Babylon”—an epithet by which Jerusalem is often esteemed, *בתולה בן ציון*, “the virgin daughter of Zion.” Note in the following passage rather than being “stained with the smear of pagan decadence,” Babylon is honored and dignified with the rank of a queen who has been sheltered, veiled, and protected from any type of manual labor:

Come down, sit in the dust, virgin daughter of Babylon! Sit on the ground dethroned, daughter of the Chaldeans! For no longer will they call you soft and dainty. Take the millstones, grind the meal, take off your veil; strip off your skirt, bare the thigh, cross the rivers. Let your nudity be displayed—yes, let your sex appear; I will take vengeance, I will not entreat man. . . .

⁸³Joan Oates, *Babylon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979) 9.

Sit in silence, enter into darkness, daughter of the Chaldeans: For no longer will they call you the mistress of kingdoms. (Isa 47:1–5)

In the succeeding lines, Babylon stands accused not of harlotry but of spells and sorceries, and can expect punishment in the form of evils and disasters which cannot be conjured away or averted. This reflects a clear picture of Babylonian practice—a reliance on incantations (spells for positive and negative results) and divination (sorceries to tell the future) and *namburbi*, and other rituals to avert predicted disasters. In light of its ethnic, cultural, and linguistic proximity, the Hebrew Bible could portray a more accurate understanding of Babylon and its culture.

Thus, we have come full circle from using Mesopotamian material to explain the Bible to using biblical material to depict Babylon. Both traditions are firmly rooted in the ancient Near East. It is the Greeks and their denigration of the female sex and of barbarians that caused them to lump together the negative attributes of both groups in their description of Babylon and its cultic rites.



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SUSAPINNU

The Mesopotamian paronymph and his role

BY

MEIR MALUL

(Haifa University)

I. Introduction

The Akkadian word *susapinnu* occurs in MB and SB sources, mostly in lexical and synonym lists, where it is equated with Sumerian *niġir* (Eme-sal *libir*)-si, and few times indeed in other kinds of sources¹). The Sumerian word *niġir*/*libir*-si occurs also in a lexical list and in a few Sumerian compositions from the OB period²).

The word *susapinnu* and its Sumerian equivalent had originally been considered a title of an official³). However, already at the end of the last century, it was connected with the Aramaic *šūšbīn*, attested frequently in Talmudic and other Jewish sources where it denotes “paronymph, best man”⁴). This was suggested as the meaning of the

1) The lexical occurrences are *MSL* 12, 101:173; 126:66-68 (in l. 66 the Sumerian column gives *niġir*-a-ša-g[a]); *TCL* 6, 35 II 26; the synonym list is *LTBA* 2, 2, 357 // I VI 21 // An IX 76 (Meissner, *BAW* 1, 72:16). The other occurrences are in two late bilingual passages, *SBH* no. 56 ob. 58f and no. 69:17; a Hittite text *StBoT* 15, 44 no. 672/u:2.6f.; and an Akkadian text from Ugarit where the word *susapinnūtu* appears, RS 16.153 (*PRU* 3, 146f.).

2) For the lexical evidence, see *MSL* 12, 60:760 (*niġir*-si). The Sumerian compositions are: *SLTN* 35; *BE* 31, 12; and line 37 in *The Instructions of Suruppak*. For a review of all the available cuneiform evidence, see below section II.

3) See the dictionaries of Delitzsch and Muss-Arnolt s.v.; G. Howardy, *Clavis Cuneorum*, London + Leipzig + København, 1933, no. 56, 46: “*magistratus*.”

4) See Jensen *apud* Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*, 1895, p. 370b; cf. Albright, *RA*, 16(1919), p. 188; *Tur-Sinai*, “*Šūšbīn*,” in: *The Language and the Book*, Vol. 3, Jerusalem, 1957, p. 336 (in Hebrew); Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic*, Chicago, 1974 (*AS* 19), p. 94.

Akkadian word too⁵), and this meaning is commonly accepted today by most scholars⁶).

However, unlike the Talmudic sources—and others to be presented in the following discussion—which enable one to get a clear notion of the nature of the role played by the *šūšbīn*, the cuneiform sources have by and large been unhelpful in this matter, and scholars could gain only a vague notion of the role of the *susapinnu* in Mesopotamian civilization.

It should be noted, however, that no one, who treated the issue of the Mesopotamian *niḡir/libir-si* = *susapinnu*, has adduced together all the available and relevant evidence, and different scholars have made use of different segments of the evidence. Also, external (i.e. Talmudic and other Jewish) and ethnological evidence, which—at least from a typological point of view—seems to be extremely suggestive in reconstructing the role of the Mesopotamian *susapinnu*⁷), has only meagerly been used⁸).

It is, therefore, the purpose of the present article to gather and re-evaluate all the available cuneiform evidence pertaining to the *niḡir/libir-si* = *susapinnu* in an effort to draw a profile of this functionary and to define the role he fulfilled. Although a careful analysis of the cuneiform evidence may help in gaining some notion of the nature of the *susapinnu*'s role, it is only the insight provided by external and ethnological evidence which points to the right interpretation of the vague hints culled from the cuneiform sources.

5) See Bezold, *Glossar*, p. 216a translating “*Brautführer*”; cf. now *AHw* 1063b; Landsberger, *Symbolae M. David*, p. 81 notes 1-2 and pp. 98f.; and most recently *CAD* S 416b.

6) See, however, recently Kraus's expressed uncertainty as to the character of this title, *RA*, 70(1976), p. 170.

7) On the justification of using external evidence in this case, see below pp. 268 ss.

8) See Van Selms's citation of Talmudic evidence, *JNES*, 9(1950), p. 73, and Greengus's citation of ethnological evidence, *JCS*, 20(1966), p. 68 note 79 and p. 70 + notes 102a-104.

II. *The Evidence*

The available cuneiform evidence on the niġir/libir-si = *susapinnu* is the following:

A. *Lexical Evidence*

1. *MSL* 12, p. 126 (Lú = *ša*):

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| 66. niġir-a-ša-g[a] | = <i>su-sa-pi-[nu]</i> |
| 67. niġir-si | = <i>su-sa-pi-[nu]</i> |
| 68. li-bi-ir | = MIN EME.[SAL] |

These three entries appear in the lexical series lú = *ša* in a section which lists kinship terms and, more specifically, terms from the realm of marital relationships. Lines 41ff., thus, list terms such as *zikaru* “man, male,” *mutum* “husband,” *hāirum* “spouse,” *aššatu* “wife,” *alti eḷli/muti* “a man’s wife,” *hīrtum* “first wife,” etc. Right before our entries appear the terms [*tappātum*] and [*serretum*] “second wife” (ll. 64-65)⁹, and following them—the terms *ibru*, [*itbaru*] “friend, best-man” (ll. 69-70)¹⁰, *emu rabû* “the wife’s brother” (ll. 71-71a), *emu šeḫru* “son-in-law” (l. 72), etc. (see also the next lines).

2. *MSL* 12, p. 60 (OB Proto-Lú):

760. niġir-si

In this series the term niġir-si is listed again among other kinship terms (see ll. 752ff. and 761ff.), thus exhibiting a similar pattern like the above-cited section from the canonical Lú = *ša* series.

3. *TCL* 6, 35 II (Erimḫuš V):

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| 25. sa-g-GIR ₅ -GIR ₅ | = <i>šam-ḫu-tú</i> |
| 26. niġir ⁿⁱ -gīr-si | = <i>su-sa-pi-in-nu</i> |
| 27. nīg-mud-BAD | = <i>an-sa-mul-lum</i> |

Of the two terms listed next to the *susapinnu*, nothing is known about the *ansamullum*¹¹). The other may be related to the term *šamḫ/katu* “pro-

9) Restoration is based on *Hh* I 94f., see *MSL* 12, p. 145 note to iii 64f.

10) On the *ibru* (Sum. ku-li) and its relation to the *susapinnu*, see Wilcke, *ZA*, 59(1969), pp. 65ff.; cf. the discussion below.

11) *CAD* A/2 144 suggests that it might be related to the *anzanīnu*, which is attested in a synonym list cited below (see no. 5). See below and Lambert, *BWL*, pp. 339f.

stitute”¹²). As to the immediate environment, the following entries (ll. 28ff.) list various agricultural terms, and the preceding entries (ll. 17ff.) list various designations of criminals such as *lā ādirum* “impudent,” *sarrirum* “liar,” *lā bajāšu* “shameless, idecent,” *nittum* “burglar,” *šarrāqum* “thief,” etc., all of which do not seem to be related to the *susapinnu* (see, however, note 39 below).

4. *MSL* 12, p. 101 (Lú = ša):

173. [niġir]-si = *su-sa-pi-nu*

This time the equation occurs in a section of the series *lú = ša* which deals with various officials such as the *targumannu* “interpreter” (l. 171), *šak-kanakku* “governor” (l. 172), *laputtū* “lieutenant” (l. 174), *aklu* “overseer” (l. 175), and more (see the other surrounding lines)¹³).

5. *LTBA* 2, 2:

356. *an-za-ni-nu* = *nap-ta-ru*

357. *su-sa-pi-nu* = MIN¹⁴

In this synonym list the *susapinnu* is equated with the *napta/uru*, which in turn is equated with the *anzanīnu*, a title of obscure meaning and function.¹⁵) The much discussed term *napta/uru* seems to be a *Standesbezeichnung*, the exact nature of which has been difficult to decipher¹⁶). Below, some comments on the *napta/uru*’s character will be offered after more relevant evidence will have been reviewed. At this point one should add another detail, which also points to the close connection between the *napta/uru* and the *susapinnu*. Both the *napta/uru* and the *susapinnu* are said to have carried

12) Cf. Lambert, *ibid.*

13) In no. 1 above line 68 the Sumerian equivalent of *susapinnu* appears to be the emesal form *libir* instead of the usual *libir-si* (for which see no. 6 below), main dialect *niġir-si*. Assuming that it is not a scribal error, the sign *si* having been inadvertently omitted, it is of interest to note that Sumerian *libir* is equated with various Akkadian terms denoting officials of various kinds, such as *gallū*, *suk-kallu*, *nāgīru*, *ḥazannu*, *laputtū*, etc. See the dictionaries sub the relevant entries, *lex.*; on the *gallū* see also note 19 below.

14) So also *ibid* 1 VI 20f., with the variant *nap-tu-ru*; and An IX 75f. = Meissner, *BAW* 1, 72:15f.: *an-[za-ni]-nu*, *s[u-sa-pi]-nu* = *nap-tū-rum*.

15) See Lambert, *op. cit.*; *CAD* A/2 152.

16) See von Soden, *ArOr*, 17/2, pp. 371f.; Finkelstein, *AS*, 16, p. 238; *idem*, *JAOS*, 90(1970), pp. 252ff.; Landsberger, *Symbolae David*, pp. 98f.; and most recently Kraus, *RA*, 70(1976), pp. 165ff. who finds difficulties in accepting the explanation of this term as denoting a *Standesbezeichnung* (Landsberger’s terminology); see below, p. 258.

a weapon in their lap. The astrological omen *ša giš.tukul úr íl ana é-gal* KU₄.ME¹⁷) is explained in a late commentary by *ša giš.tukul úr = nap-tarum*¹⁸). The *nap-tarum*, thus, is said to have been a person who used to carry a “lap”-weapon¹⁹). The *susapinnu* is described in a similar fashion in a bilingual text presented under no. 10 below.

B. *Sumerian Evidence*²⁰).

6. *SLTN* 35:²¹)

This text belongs to the cycle of Dumuzi-Inanna love-songs, describing the sacred marriage rite. It relates how Inanna has sent for the shepherd, the farmer, the fowler, and the fisherman to come and bring her presents for her wedding. The four men, among whom appears Dumuzi, the bridegroom, are called the *libir-si* of Inanna²²), and each of them brings her, just before the marriage is consummated, wedding presents from the field of his specialty.

7. *BE* 31, 12:

This is a short hymn to Inanna wherein she is depicted as a harlot, who, when the evening star (= Inanna, see line 25) rises in the sky, sets out to the alehouse to solicit for lovers, while standing in the window²³). The hymn

17) Virolleaud, *L'astrologie chaldéenne*, *Sin* (fasc. 1), Paris, 1908, No. XXIV: 44.

18) *AfO*, 14(1941-1944), Tf. VII ii 11.

19) On this title, see Landsberger, *loc. cit.*; on the “lap”-weapon, see *MSL* 6, 85:15 and 109:55; Kraus, *op. cit.*, p. 170. Another official, the *gallú*, is also said to carry a “lap”-weapon; see the citation from Inanna's Descent in Landsberger, *op. cit.*, p. 98 note 3, which describes some of the *gallú*'s accompanying Inanna as carrying a “lap”-weapon.

20) I wish to express my sincere thanks to Prof. J. Klein of Bar-Ilan University for unstintingly spending much of his valuable time discussing with me the relevant Sumerian evidence. He also kindly provided me with transliteration and translation of the difficult bilingual text *SBH* no. 69 (see below no. 9). I also acknowledge the kind help extended to me by Prof. Klein's student Dr. I. Tsefati. Needless to say, the sole responsibility for the interpretation of the evidence suggested below rests with me.

21) See Kramer, *PAPS*, 107/6(1963), pp. 497ff.; *ANET*, pp. 638f.; Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, New-Haven and London, 1976, pp. 32ff.; cf. Greengus, *JCS*, 20, pp. 69f.

22) On Dumuzi's title *libir-si* and other titles, see Greengus, *ibid*, p. 69 note 82.

23) For a summary of this hymn's contents and for a translation of the relevant passage, see Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, p. 140. The relevant lines are cited and translated also by Alster, *The Instructions of Suruppak*, Copenhagen, 1974, pp. 83f.

describes in detail what Inanna does in the evening, when the cattle returns from grazing to the pen for the night: she dresses like one of no repute, puts on her neck the beads of a harlot, and goes to fetch men from the alehouse. The hymn then adds:

19. úr-nita-dam-zu ^ddumu-zi-da-ka U.PIRIG tag-tag-ge-zu-dè
20. ^dinanna niġir-si imin-zu ki-ná mu-e-da-ak-e

“When you trip along into the lap of Dumuzi, your Bridegroom,
“Inanna, your seven (= all)²⁴) paranympths lie with you²⁵!”

The Sumerian phrase ki-ná---ak, translated here “to lie with,” has been understood to imply that Inanna’s paranympths are actually making love with her²⁶). As suggested by Prof. Klein, this phrase is ambiguous, and so too the picture conveyed by lines 19-20. One cannot be sure whether the poet wanted to depict Inanna as an unfaithful bride with tremendous sexual appetite, sneaking away from her bridegroom and making love with her paranympths (so Alster). One might as well interpret the lines as depicting her in bed with Dumuzi (lying in his Lap = making love with him?), while at the same time her paranympths are lying with her. The phrase ki-ná ---ak means literally “to lie,” and it does not necessarily mean “to make love²⁷).” Be it as it may, one thing seems to be clear: Whether Inanna did actually make love with her paranympths or just let them lie by her on her bed²⁸), it is clear that they were in very intimate terms with her. Also, depicting her as a harlot soliciting for lovers, endows the whole passage with a strong sexual aura²⁹).

24) Cf. Falkenstein, *ZA*, 45, p. 170 note 3.

25) The translation “trip along *into*” follows Jacobsen’s understanding of the hymn. Alster translates “you sneak away from the lap of Dumuzi.” The text, however, favours Jacobsen’s rendering, since it has the dimensional -a (^ddumu-zi-da-ka) rather than the ablative -ta.

26) Alster translates the line “Inanna, you make love with your seven paranympths!” So it is implied also by Lambert, *BWL*, pp. 339f.; cf. Greengus, *op. cit.*, p. 68. Jacobsen translates “Inanna, your seven bridal attendants are bedding you!”

27) Cf. Römer’s rendering of the phrase in the Iddin-Dagan hymn: “...liegt bei dir” (*SKH* p. 142 line 187; see his comments to the line on p. 193 and there more literature); cf. Falkenstein, *loc. cit.*: “Inanna, deine sieben Brautführer liegen bei dir”; Landsberger, *Symbolae David*, p. 81 note 2c: “begleiten dich ins Brautgemach und leisten dort Dienst.”

28) While she was making love with her bridegroom? See the external evidence summarized below.

29) On the implications of this sexual aura for the present discussion, see below pp. 00.

8. *The Instructions of Suruppak*:

37. nitah niġir-si na-an-ak ní-zu na-an-¹x¹-¹x¹

“Do not let a male serve as a paranymp, do not [deceive?] yourself³⁰!”

This line has been interpreted by Alster as reflecting the danger of the paranymp’s exercising liberty with the bride³¹). The fact that this instruction is directed against a male paranymp seems to support this interpretation, since a female paranymp would not have been considered a menace to the groom. Also, that something licentious may indeed have been envisaged in line 37 seems to be borne out by the next two lines which form with it a strophe with a unified theme³²). Line 38, thus, instructs the son not to play with a young married maiden, lest people would slander him³³). Line 39 warns the *dumu* not to dwell together with a married man, and this is interpreted by Wilcke in two possible ways³⁴): Either line 39 is addressed to a daughter, in which case it would parallel line 38; or it is addressed to the son warning him from the results of dwelling together with a married man, coming thereby into too close contacts with a married woman³⁵). The strophe seems thus to deal with illicit and forbidden relationships between a man and someone else’s wife which could arise in different situations, one of which is being appointed as a paranymp. The results of the various situations envisaged in the above lines are spelled out in line 40 which says: “Do not let a quarrel [start], do not bring shame on yourself!”

30) Translation according to Alster, *op. cit.*, pp. 36f.; cf. Wilcke, *ZA*, 68(1978), p. 204.

31) *Op. cit.*, p. 83.

32) See Alster, *Studies in Sumerian Proverbs*, Copenhagen, 1975, p. 78; cf. pp. 53, 65; on the strophic patterns of the *Instructions*, see pp. 52ff. and 57ff. Wilcke (*loc. cit.*) counts also line 40 in this strophe; see below.

33) Following Wilcke’s translation and understanding of the line, see *loc. cit.* and also note to line on p. 215. Alster translates: “Do not speak(?) with a girl if you are married(?), the slander is strong.” Whether one accepts Wilcke’s or Alster’s translation, the message of the line is clear: one has to be discreet in his dealings with other (married) women for obvious reasons.

34) *Op. cit.*, p. 215 note to the line.

35) Alster translated line 39 as follows: “[My] son, do not sit (alone) in a [chamber] with someone’s wife,” understanding the Sumerian phrase *lú dam-tuku* as “a married woman” on the basis of a bilingual passage (see p. 84 note to line 39) where this phrase is equated with *alti amēli* “a man’s wife.” See, however, his later reservations in *Studies*, p. 140, where he preferred to leave the line untranslated.

C. *Bilingual Evidence*9. *SBH* no. 69:

This late and difficult text seems to contain a lament by a certain goddess(?) over the dead Enlil, and a song, probably of the fertility cult type. When the text begins, we meet the goddess declaring her wish to return to her city and house, and to Enlil, whom she calls “my father” (ob. 1-6; Enlil is called “my father” also in rv. 20-21). Ob. 7-rv. 16 contain the fertility song, in the context of which the *niġir-si* = *susapinnu* is mentioned. A translation of ob. lines 7-23, which contain an address may by Enlil(?) to a young maiden (the above goddess?)³⁶), follows³⁷):

- 7-8) “Young [girl], who *wandered for me* for many days, do not wander about!
- 9) [Maide]n, you who *wandered for me* for many days, do not wander about!
- 10) You who wear the [ornament] of šuba-stones, who wandered for me for many days, do not *wander about*!
- 11-12) When you bathe for me, when you adorn yourself for me,
- 13) When you are *provided* with the headband which is put (on your head),
- 14-15) When you put on the [... garment], do not *wander about*!
- 16-17) [Mai]den, let me be (Akk. I am) your paronymph, why do you not desire me?
- 18) [Lad]y of the treasury, I am your paronymph, why do you not desire me?
- 19-20) I shall cause your [bu]lls low in your cattle-pen,
- 21) I shall make yo[ur sheep] *bleat* in the enclosure,
- 22-23) I shall make yo[ur ...] *roar* in the street!”

In the following lines the maiden seems to consent to Enlil’s request, she enters his house, into the “bridal chamber”(?) of the Ekur, and an intimate union takes place (ob. 24-rv. 9). Rv. 10-16 record a promise made either by the goddess or by Enlil to bring him/her the choicest cream and milk from the cattle-pen. The final lines (rv. 17-25) contain the goddess’s call to wait for and lament her father, Enlil, who lies dead.

Leaving aside the unsolved difficulties of the text—particularly the unclear relation between the lament and the fertility song—one should concentrate on the section which mentions the *susapinnu*. Some points are of

36) Greengus. *JCS*, 20, p. 69 note 85 mistakenly reads the name of Inanna in line 18. The sign, which appears on the tablet, is èrim and not mûš (= Inanna); see the following translation of the line.

37) Based on J. Klein’s transliteration and translation, kindly put at my disposal. Ob. 11-17 are also cited and translated by Landsberger in *Symbolae David*, p. 81 note 1.

significance for the theme of this article. The maiden is described as undergoing certain preparations as if for her wedding: Bathing, adorning, and dressing with finaries (see in detail below). Enlil(?) entreats her to accept him as her *niġir-si* = *susapinnu*. In return for her consent, he promises her abundance in the cattle-pen. Later a union takes place between the maiden and Enlil in the bridal chamber of the Ekur. If it was Enlil who addressed the maiden in the previous section, then there is an identity between the *susapinnu* and the bridegroom, assuming that Enlil is indeed the bridegroom in a sacred marriage cult. Finally, if rv. 10-16 refer to Enlil, then the *susapinnu*-bridegroom brings the bride choice cream and milk (cf. no. 6 above).

10. *SBH* no. 56 + no. 155:

This is a hymn to Inanna/Ištar which describes in first person speech the various aspects of this multifaceted goddess. She is described as the evening star, a goddess of war, a harlot, a goddess of thunderstorms and rains, etc.³⁸) the section immediately relevant to our discussion covers lines 49-59 of the obverse. A citation of it follows:

49. [ká-é]š-dam-ma-ka [tuš-a-m]u-[dè]
 a-ka e-eš-da
50. ina ba-ab aš-tam-mi [] / ina a-šá-bi-ia
51. [kar-]kid mu-lu mu-zu m[e-e-ši-i]n-ga-mèn []
 ka-ar ní-zu
52. šar-ra-ki-tum
53. [] / ha-ri-im-tum ra-im-tum ana-k[u-ma]
54. [] x-ni? [] nu-x[] ga[-mèn?]
55. [] / x-ir/sa? [] x x ul x/]
56. [sa-]atur_{tu}-ra []]
57. še-tú ša/er?-ra-a-at? [] x []
58. [li-b]i-ir-si me-ri kin-a [] a-[mèn]
59. su-s[a-pi-i]n-nu paṭ-ri zaq-t[u] šá ina su-nu šak-nu
 a[na-ku-ma]

49-50. When I sit at the door of the alehouse,

51-53. I am a loving prostitute³⁹).

54-55. [When I.....?

56-57. [I am] a net (destined for??) the young ones(??)

58-59. I am a paranymp with a sharp sword carried in the lap.

38) For a summary of Inanna's various aspects, see Jacobsen, *Treasures*, pp. 135ff.

39) In Sumerian "I am a prostitute who knows the man." A gloss on line 52 reads ka-ar ní-zu = *šarrak/qitum* which is interpreted by *AHw* 1187b as "die Schenkfreudige" from the verb *šarāku* "to grant, give presents." *CAD* H 101a s.v.

The next lines go on to describe Inanna as the evening star, standing in the sky in the evening and filling it with her awe and radiance.

It is unfortunate that lines 54-57 are badly damaged, and so it is not clear what aspect of Inanna is described right before her description as a paranymp with a sharp sword in his lap⁴⁰). It is interesting, however, to note the close juxtaposition between the mention of the paranymp and Inanna's description as a harlot sitting at the entrance to the alehouse. This juxtaposition is significant in view of other evidence presented above (nos. 3, 7), which connects somehow between the paranymp and the harlot as well as the alehouse⁴¹).

D. Akkadian Evidence

11. *RS* 16.153 = *PRU* 3, p. 146f.:

The only and the earliest allusion to the *susapinnu* in an Akkadian text is in this document from Ugarit, which mentions the not altogether clear *kasap susapinnūti* "the money of the position of the *susapinnu*." The document reports a grant made by the king to Yaširānu, the scribe. The grant consisted of a village and all the privileges entailed by it, including the enjoyment of the *kasap susapinnūti*. It is hard to discover the meaning and nature of this money from the available evidence. Rainey has suggested that it denoted money paid as a tax by paranymps who arranged for weddings⁴²). This is impossible to prove since, to begin with, there is absolutely no evidence of a *susapinnu* arranging weddings in Ugarit, nor of any of his other possible activities and functions⁴³). One might as well interpret the *kasap susapinnūti* as money paid by the *susapinnu* for being appointed to the post

ḥarimtu lex. interprets it as a "female thief." From the point of view of the Sumerian, *CAD*'s suggestion seems more probable: *ní-zu* is a common Sumerian equivalent of *šarrāqu* "thief," see *AHW* 1187f. s.v. *šarrāqu*. It is not clear what is its meaning in this context. One, however, should note the Erimḫuš passage cited above (no. 3), where in the immediate environment of the *susapinnu* appear titles of various criminals, among whom also the *šarrāqu* "thief." See also the text from Ugarit mentioned below (no. 11), where the term *kasap susapinnūti* is juxtaposed with the term *kasap šarrakūti*, see below p. 258.

40) Did these lines contain a figurative description of Inanna as a harlot using a net to catch young lovers?

41) On the alehouse, which is closely connected with the figure of Inanna/Ištar, see *CAD* A/2 s.v. *aššammu* and there literature; cf. Lambert, *BWL*, p. 339.

42) *A Social Structure of Ugarit*, Jerusalem, 1967, pp. 73, 100 (in Hebrew).

43) It could very well be that the *susapinnu* in Ugarit had nothing to do with the *susapinnu* attested in other periods and places, but this cannot be ascertained with the available evidence.

of the *susapinnu*, much as other functionaries in Ugarit had to pay a yearly tax to the palace for being appointed to their post⁴⁴). Of special interest in this context is the post of the *mudû šarri/šarrati* which entailed the payment of a yearly tax (*mudātu*, CAD M/2 161a) to the crown by the person appointed to this post⁴⁵).

One should also call attention to the juxtaposition in this document between the *kasap susapinnūti* and the *kasap šarrakūti* (line 15). Rainey has suggested that the latter may denote money for freeing temple oblates, thus interpreting *šarrakūti* as people dedicated to the temple like NB *širkūtu*⁴⁶). AHW 1187b suggests “eine Fest-Zahlung,” i.e., some tax exacted on the occasion of (marriage?) festivities? Does the word *šarrakūtu* have anything to do with the *šarrak/qūtu* appearing as a variant gloss to the *ḥarīmtu* in the above-mentioned hymn to Inanna/Ištar? It is impossible to decide on the basis of the available evidence (see also note 39 above).

E. Hittite Evidence

12. *StBoT* 15, p. 44 no. 672/u:

This text is badly damaged and defies any attempt at a connected translation. Only some summary remarks are possible⁴⁷. The text probably records some ritual of lustration performed in the temple(?). Someone's feet (of the *šangû*-priest mentioned in line 8') are washed (by the *zuzapinnu*? See line 6'). In line 7' the *zuzapinnu* is depicted as being under a bed⁴⁸). Finally, lines 8'-9' mention, beside the *šangû*-priest, also the *katra*-priestess, probably some type of cult singer. Do we have here also a fertility cult performed in the temple, in which the *šangû*-priest and the *katra*-priestess officiated as the divine couple? Does the bed mentioned in the text in connection with the *zuzapinnu* have anything to do with such a cult (cf. no. 7 above)? Nothing definite can be said due to the fragmentary state of the text.

44) See Rainey, *ibid.*, p. 33.

45) See Speiser, *JAOS*, 75(1955), pp. 161f.; Rainey, *op. cit.*, pp. 51ff. On the *mudû* and its relevance to the subject under discussion here, see below p. 273. On payments made by paranympths upon their appointment to their office, see below p. 271.

46) *Op. cit.*, pp. 34, 73.

47) I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Hittitologists Drs. A. Kempinski and I. Singer for kindly providing me with a translation of the text and some notes.

48) Kempinski suggests that it might have been the deity's votive bed in the temple.

F. *Miscellanea*13. *Sumer* XIII 117, 10'-11' = *LKA* 71: 8:⁴⁹⁾

This quite ambiguous theological text mentions twice the $lú_{su-sa-BE/NU}$ next to the *kurgarrû*. *AHw* reads the signs as $lú_{susānu}$, interpreting it as a title of some functionary. Lambert suggested to read $lú_{SU-SA-BE}$, interpreting it as a logogram for *susapinnu*⁵⁰⁾. There is no proof to the correctness of the equation $lú_{SU-SA-BE} = susapinnu$, nor to the superiority of Lambert's reading of the signs over the reading $lú_{su-sa-nu}$ ⁵¹⁾, and as Matsushima notes, the only advantage to Lambert's suggestion is the proximity in the text between this $lú_{su-sa-BE/NU}$ and the *kurgarrû*, who is known to have functioned in the cult of Ištar⁵²⁾. This, however, is not a sufficient evidence. This text, therefore, will not be included in the following discussion.

III. *The Interpretation of the Evidence*

One is now confronted with the difficult task of digesting the above not always altogether clear evidence, trying to interpret it with the role and nature of the *niġir-si* = *susapinnu* in mind.

First of all, the evidence unanimously refers to the person carrying this title as a male; there is no case of a female *susapinnu*⁵³⁾. As to the nature and role of this person, the evidence seems to reveal three salient aspects: A. The marital aspect. B. The sexual aspect. C. The official aspect. Some comments on each aspect are offered below.

49) See the recent edition of this composition by E. Matsushima, *Orient*, XV(1979), pp. 1ff.

50) *Apud* Matsushima, *ibid*, p. 13 note to line (9); cf. also *CAD* K 558.

51) There are other clear cases of the $lú_{susānu}$ in other texts (see *AHw* s.v.), whereas no other case of this equation exists.

52) On the *kurgarrû*, see *RLA* IV, pp. 463ff.; *CAD* K s.v. discussion section.

53) In no. 10 Inanna/Ištar calls herself a *susapinnu*, but this should not be taken as more than one of many titles and characterizations of this goddess, both from the male as well as from the female spheres. Line 37 of the *Instructions of Suruppak* (no. 8 above), which warns against appointing a male paranymp, may be understood to imply that the appointment of a female paranymp could be possible. The fact, however, is that no example of a female paranymp exists, and this does not seem to be coincidental.

A. *The Marital Aspect*

Much of the evidence presented above depicts the niġir/libir-si = *susapinnu* as a person having somehow something to do with marital relationships, and, more specifically, with weddings⁵⁴). Thus, the lexical evidence (nos. 1, 2) lists the niġir/libir-si = *susapinnu* among clear kinship terms, and specifically terms from the realm of marital relationships. He appears between the “second wife” and the *ibru/itbaru* lit. “friend”, who seems also to have had something to do with weddings (see below). This context clearly accords the term *susapinnu* the connotation of some role from the realm of marital relationships⁵⁵).

This impression is strengthened by the “narrative”-literary evidence. In no. 6, Inanna’s libir-si’s are charged with the task of bringing wedding presents to the bride to the nuptial chamber just before the marriage is to be consummated. It might be that a similar presentation is reflected in no. 9, where (probably) Enlil declares his wish to bring choice cream and milk to the maiden who entered the bridal chamber of the Ekur⁵⁶). The significance of this datum will be discussed further below. Here one should compare the similar custom attested in the Gilgamesh Epic in the famous passage describing a man hurrying with a tray of delightful food to the nuptial chamber⁵⁷).

54) In this sense the long held view of the connection of the Mesopotamian *susapinnu* with the Talmudic *šūšbīn* is not without basis. See, however, the discussion below.

55) Contra the *CAD*, however, one would not be able to arrive at the definition “friend of the bridegroom participating in the wedding ceremony” (vol. S 416b) on the basis of the Akkadian and lexical evidence alone, and one would have to use the Sumerian evidence as well. Difficult also is the definition “friend of the bridegroom” which is not borne out by the available cuneiform evidence; see in detail below and note 127.

56) Cf. also ob. 19-23 where Enlil promises the maiden abundance in the cattle-pen for her consent to accept him as her niġir-si = *susapinnu*.

57) Gilg. P. IV 22ff., see Greengus, *JCS*, 20, pp. 60ff.; on the interpretation of the phrase *bīt emūtim* as “the nuptial chamber,” see Finkelstein, *RA*, 61, pp. 131ff.; on the scene reflected in this Gilgamesh passage and its modern analogues, see *ibid* pp. 133, 136; cf. below.

The difficult text cited under no. 9 depicts Enlil as proposing to be the *niğir-si* = *susapinnu* of the maiden. His proposal comes at the end of a section describing the maiden's preparations, which include bathing, adorning herself, and dressing with her fineries. Similar preparations are described in no. 6 which relates the whole process of Inanna and Dumuzi's wedding. It seems then that no. 9 also depicts the *susapinnu* as appearing on the scene when the bride has ceremonially and customarily prepared herself for her wedding⁵⁸).

No. 7 too seems to allude to marriage, as it depicts Inanna as tripping into, or sneaking from⁵⁹), her *bridegroom's* lap, whereupon her seven paranymphs are said to lie with her.

No. 8 warns against appointing a male paranymph, supposedly to accompany the bride and/or render her other services⁶⁰). It could, however, be argued that appointing a *niğir-si* did not necessarily have to be in the context of marriage, and it could take place in the context of another, still unknown, occasion. And if so the paranymph in no. 8 had nothing to do with weddings. The weight of the evidence, however, would favour the assumption that also here a marriage is envisaged.

Combining the evidence from all the texts mentioned above⁶¹), it would seem safe to conclude that the Mesopotamian *niğir/libir-si* = *susapinnu* had something to do with weddings. Also, he seems

58) On this sequence of actions preceding the wedding, see Landsberger, *Symbolae David*, pp. 78ff.; Greengus, *op. cit.*, pp. 61f. This sequence of actions seems to have been of ceremonial nature, as they are frequently attested elsewhere as describing the bride's customary preparations before the wedding night; see Neufeld, *Ancient Hebrew Marriage Laws*, London, 1944, p. 149; cf. Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie*, Leipzig, 1911, vol. II, pp. 37f. On the bath taken by the bride and bridegroom before the wedding night in various places around the world, see Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 5th ed., New York, 1922 (henceforth *History*), vol. II, pp. 503ff.

59) See the comments above p. 246.

60) For the various services expected from, and rendered by, paranymphs, see below, pp. 261-268 and 269.

61) The Hittite text (above no. 12) is not helpful in this respect.

always to be in some relation to the bride only; never is there any explicit or implicit connection between this person and the bridegroom⁶²). This is a very significant datum, the implications of which will be elaborated upon below. Finally, judging from no. 6, the paranymp was charged with bringing presents to the bride to the nuptial chamber (see also no. 9)⁶³). Unfortunately, there is nothing more that one could glean from the available evidence as to the paranymp's other possible specific tasks and roles on the occasion of a wedding ceremony. (See, however, the next section.)

B. *The Sexual Aspect*

Part of the evidence surrounds the paranymp with a strong aura of sexuality or lewd behaviour.

To start again with the lexical evidence, in no. 3 the *niġir-si* = *susapinnu* is listed right after the *šamḫutu*, which is related probably to the *šamḫ/katu* "prostitute." In no. 5 the *naṭṭa/uru* is equated both with the *susapinnu* and the *anzanīnu*. Although it is impossible to discover the meaning and function of the latter on the basis of the available evidence, it should be noted that the *anzanīnu* is attested in the same context together with both Ištar and the *bīt aštammi* "the alehouse" (*BWL* 218 rv. IV 3-5). The relation of Ištar to the alehouse as well as her character as a harlot are features quite known in Mesopotamian tradition. This evidence, vague as it is, may again point to the sexual aura surrounding the paranymp⁶⁴).

Admittedly, the lexical evidence is far from being clear in this respect. However, when one turns to the literary evidence, the

62) Contra *CAD* S 416b. In no. 6 the paranymps are explicitly called *libir-si-zu* "your (Inanna's) paranymps," and in no. 9 Enlil wants to be the maiden's *nigir-si* = *susapinnu* (*nigir-si-zu* = *susapinki*).

63) Cf. Greengus, *JCS*, 20, pp. 60f. 70.

64) Cf. Lambert, *BWL*, pp. 339f. who, however, arrives at a far more reaching conclusion concerning the sexual nature of the *susapinnu*: According to him, the *susapinnu* exercised the *ius primae noctis*. For a criticism of this view, see Landsberger, *op. cit.*, p. 81 note 2d; Greengus, *op. cit.*, pp. 68ff.; see more below.

paranymph's sexual character emerges in clearer light. It is clearest in no. 7 which describes and emphasizes Inanna's aspect as a harlot who dresses up as harlot and goes out to solicit for lovers from the alehouse. Moreover, it is this text which relates that seven paranymphs are doing *ki-ná---ak* with Inanna. Whether one interprets this phrase as connoting actual sexual relationships between Inanna and her paranymphs, or as just describing them as present with her in the nuptial chamber (while making love with her bridegroom?), it is clear that they were in very intimate terms with her, which—one could safely assume—may at times have led to illicit sexual behaviour. This assumption finds clear echo in the external evidence to be summarized below (see pp. 00). One, however, does not have to go far afield for support, for it exists right in the cuneiform evidence, in no. 8.

No. 8, it will be remembered, is one of Suruppak's instructions, by which he warns his son not to appoint a male paranymph. This has been interpreted as reflecting a real danger of the paranymph's exercising liberty with the bride, an interpretation which finds support in the immediate context of the line (see above, p. 247). Nos. 7 and 8 taken together would thus supplement each other: On the one hand, no. 8 strengthens the impression that the phrase *ki-ná---ak* in no. 7 could be understood as reflecting something more than the paranymphs just lying down with Inanna. On the other hand, no. 7 makes clear why one should beware of appointing a male paranymph as stipulated in no. 8: Most probably, paranymphs were admitted into the nuptial chamber, whereupon they got into such intimate terms with the bride, that they could be regarded as real menace to the bridegroom (cf. also below). As summarized above, lines 38-39 of the *Instructions*, if interpreted correctly, also point in the direction of an illicit behaviour between a man and a married woman.

The intimate relationships between the *susapinnu* and the bride are also reflected in no. 9, in which Enlil proposes to be the maiden's *susapinnu* and invites her to the bridal chamber of the Ekur where an intimae union between them takes place. It should, however, be said

that according to this fertility song, Enlil is both the paranymp and bridegroom of the maiden.

To this section belong also nos. 10 and 12. In the first, Ištar describes herself as a *susapinnu* carrying a sharp sword in his lap. It will be remembered that also in this hymn is there a close juxtaposition between the mention of the paranymp and the description of Ištar as a harlot sitting at the door of the alehouse. In no. 12, the Hittite text, the *zuzapinnu* is said to be under a certain bed (in the temple?). Although the context is altogether unclear, and one cannot be sure whether this text also depicts some rite of sacred marriage between the female and male priests mentioned in it, the mention of a bed in close relation to the *zuzapinnu* must be of some significance, in view of the clear sexual aspect of this figure attested in the other sources.

To summarize this aspect of the paranymp, he seems to have been in intimate terms with the bride. He was probably admitted into the nuptial chamber, and this may well have given rise to his acquiring a sexual character, for, so it seems, paranymps may at times have exercised liberty with the bride.

C. *The Official Aspect*

According to part of the evidence, mostly the lexical, the *niĝir/libir-si* = *susapinnu* seems to have been some kind of official, of the same or similar order as other officials such as the *targumannu*, *šakkanakku*, *laputtû*, *aklu*, etc. The *niĝir-si* = *susapinnu* is listed in no. 4 among these and other officials in a *lú* = *ša*-type list of professions and functions. It is clear that the compiler of the list regarded the *susapinnu* too as some type of official⁶⁵).

A similar conclusion can be reached on the basis of no. 5 where the *susapinnu* is equated with the *nap̄ta/uru*. The latter, it will be

65) One should mention here the etymology of the Sumerian *niĝir-si* suggested by Landsberger (*op. cit.*, p. 81, note 2a) "The herald (*niĝir* = *nāgīru*) with the horn (*si* = *qarnu*)," i.e., an official who publicly announced weddings?

remembered, has been understood to be a *Standesbezeichnung*. The *napṭaru* is attested together with the *mudû* and *ubāru* in LE 41, two other officials of some type⁶⁶). Several texts from Ugarit summarized by Rainey⁶⁷) report the appointment of individuals to the post of *mudû šarri/šarrati* which conferred on the appointees certain privileges and high status⁶⁸). According to PRU 3, 89 = RS 15.123 + 16.152, two individuals have been appointed as *napṭaru*'s by the king of Ugarit, though, one must admit, the kind of status acquired thereby by these men and the meaning of their appointment are quite vague. The relation between the *napṭaru* and the *mudû* (the latter connoting the idea of acquaintance, friend) is significant for the present discussion, for it seems to parallel a similar relation between the *susapinnu* and the *ibru* "friend." This point will be developed further below; here one should only summarize and say that if one should take the equation between the *susapinnu* and the *napṭaru* as significant, then the *susapinnu* seems also to have been some type of official.

Remaining with the Ugaritic evidence, one should recall no. 11 which reports a grant of a city together with its incomes, including the income called *kasap susapinnūti*, made by the king to Yaširānu. If one interprets the *kasap susapinnūti* as a tax analogous to the *mudātu-tax*, i.e., a tax exacted yearly from a person appointed to the post of *mudû šarri/šarrati*, then we have here another hint of the *susapinnu* as an appointed official.

Finally, the Hittite text (no. 12) mentions the *susapinnu* with a *lú*-determinative, pointing thus, according to Otten, to its character as a *Berufsbezeichnung*⁶⁹).

Before summarizing this section, one should recall the datum mentioned above about both the *napṭaru* and the *susapinnu* carrying a "lap"-weapon⁷⁰). With the available Mesopotamian evidence it is

66) See Finkelstein, *JAOS*, 90(1970), pp. 252ff.

67) *Op. cit.* (above note 42), pp. 51ff.

68) Cf. Finkelstein, *op. cit.*, and especially p. 253 note 47.

69) See Otten, *StBoT* 15, p. 15.

70) See above pp. 244-245 and no. 10.

not clear how one should interpret this datum. Should one understand this weapon as a status insignia, thus falling in line with the official standing of the *naptaru* and *susapinnu*? If so, these were some kind of officials recognized by a sword they carried in a certain way. It should be noted that it would be more difficult to relate the weapon-datum to the marital or sexual aspect of the *susapinnu*; for what could possibly be the meaning of a paranymp carrying a sword in a wedding ceremony or in the nuptial chamber? As it happens, this is one of those cases where clear but very incomplete cuneiform evidence is supplemented and nicely illuminated by external evidence. The latter clearly places the sword in the context of the wedding ceremonies, but this is the subject of section V below.

To summarize: The *susapinnu* seems to have been an appointed (public?) official of some type, which may have had to pay a yearly tax for his post. His being listed among clear public officials clearly puts him in some relation to the court. By virtue of his status or as a symbol of the nature of his office he carried a sword in his lap.

IV. *Summary and More Questions*

Combining the evidence gleaned from all the different sources summarized above, what kind of profile of the *niĝir/libir-si* = *susapinnu* could one draw? This seems to have been some kind of official which may have been appointed to his office. This office granted him the right or obligation to carry a “lap”-weapon, probably some kind of dagger or sword girded on his thigh. His office had to do with weddings, and more specifically, he seems to have been in some relation vis-à-vis the bride. It is clear that he brought her presents; i.e., he was probably charged with the tasks of bringing presents and food stuff to the bride to the nuptial chamber. It is also clear that he was in very intimate terms with the bride, since the evidence clearly describes an illicit behaviour between the two as a viable possibility. Finally, to judge from the text from Ugarit, he may have had to pay for the honor of being appointed as a *susapinnu*.

Still, much remains vague in the above profile, and several questions remain with no answer. Beside bringing presents to the bride, what else did the *susapinnu* do in the context of a wedding? Why should he be admitted to the nuptial chamber at all and for what purpose? What was the purpose of the weapon he carried, and in this context, what was his relation to the *nap̄tarum*, the other official similarly characterized as carrying a "lap"-weapon, and with whom he is equated in a synonym list? How is his official character to be explained if he was only a paranymp functioning in a wedding ceremony, i.e., in a private matter? Finally, how all these aspects combine together to produce a clear and coherent profile of the *susapinnu*?

As has been said, to answer these questions one has to broaden his view and look for external and ethnological evidence, which may, typologically speaking, be of much help in reconstructing the role of the Mesopotamian *susapinnu*. The justification in adducing external evidence far removed in time and/or place from the orbit of Mesopotamian civilization lies in the fact that in the specific case of the institution of the paranymp there is a striking parallelism between the salient features of his role as culled from the cuneiform sources and the paranymp's role as attested in other cultures and societies⁷¹). The latter evidence supplies the missing links and fills in the gaps left by the cuneiform sources. In the following, use will be made of evidence gleaned from Talmudic and late Jewish sources, as well as from Karaite sources of the eleventh and thirteenth centuries A.D., which seem to reflect age-old customs. Ethnological evidence is supplied by the life and culture of Arab *fellaḥīn* in the Near East, especially in Syria and Palestine in the previous and the present centuries, and by marriage customs among various Berber and Arab tribes in Morocco.

71) Cf. Finkelstein's similar remark with regard to the parallelism between modern Arab marriage customs and the practices reflected in ancient Mesopotamian as well as in Biblical and post-Biblical Jewish sources which "viewed as a whole, seem to me more than coincidental," *RA*, 61(1967), p. 135 note 3.

V. *The External Evidence*

Among various peoples in the world one can find the man or men functioning as the bride's and/or the bridegroom's paranympths, keeping company with the couple, and rendering various services during the wedding ceremonies and even later⁷²). In the following a short summary of the paranympth's functions and services as attested in the explored external sources will be presented.

Among the paranympth's various functions and services rendered during and after the wedding is the task of bringing presents, including food stuffs, to the couple or to each of them separately. According to Talmudic sources, the paranympths (*šūšbīnīm*) had to bring various presents and thus to help defray the costs of the wedding⁷³). Similar is the evidence pertaining to the *fellaḥīn* in Syria and Palestine⁷⁴).

In Morocco the close friends of the bridegroom bid for the post of the paranympth, and it is given to the one who bids the highest sum⁷⁵). Among some Moroccan tribes the bride's paranympths are appointed according to their wealth, for they are expected to give money presents to the bride⁷⁶). It is specifically said that these gifts and presents in kind are intended to help the wedding couple defray the costs of the wedding which can assume enormous proportions⁷⁷). The bridegroom is supposed to pay back in similar fashion when one of the paranympths gets married⁷⁸).

72) See in general Westermarck, *History*, vol. I p. 205 note 3 and vol. II pp. 526ff.; *idem*, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*, London, 1914 (henceforth *Ceremonies*), p. 396 index s.v. "Best-man."

73) See Kraus, *op. cit.*, p. 41; Tur-Sinai, *op. cit.* (above note 4), p. 337.

74) See Wetzstein, *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 5(1873), pp. 288, 292 (describing marriage customs among the Syrian *fellaḥīn*); Granquist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*, vol. II, Helsingfors, 1935, pp. 112f. + note 1, p. 117 note 1, p. 134 note 1.

75) Westermarck, *Ceremonies*, p. 106.

76) *Ibid.*, p. 151.

77) See Wetzstein, *op. cit.*, p. 292; Granquist, *op. cit.*, p. 112 note 1; Krauss, *op. cit.*, pp. 41f.

78) Cf. Van Selms, *JNES*, 9, p. 68 + note 26; for Palestine, see Granquist, *op. cit.*, pp. 112f. note 1; Westermarck, *Ceremonies*, pp. 106, 125. According to the

Of special interest is a custom reported for the Near Eastern *fellaḥīn*, according to which a man is appointed⁷⁹⁾ to bring a special meal, "the supper of the bride," to the young couple in the nuptial chamber, either before or after the consummation of the marriage⁸⁰⁾. This man is called among the Syrian *fellaḥīn šebīn*, which is etymologically related to Akkadian *susapinnu* and to Talmudic *šūšbīn*⁸¹⁾.

The paranympths, who attend very closely on the couple during the whole week or more of the wedding ceremonies, are supposed not only to keep company with them, but also to guard them (each by his own paranympth) against real or imaginative dangers, keep their interests, such as to prevent the surrounding people from harming them or stealing presents or money belonging to them⁸²⁾, and more⁸³⁾. The paranympth's role as a guard has several nuances. One of them, which lasts beyond the period of the marriage ceremonies, has special significance with regard to the bride, as will be shown below. Here one should dwell upon his immediate role as a guard during the wedding, a role which entitles him to carry a weapon.

Talmud, the return of the presents could even be claimed in court; see Krauss, *op. cit.* pp. 41f.; cf. Westermarck, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

79) In Palestine, according to Granquist, *op. cit.*, pp. 78f., several men used to vie with one another in order to win the honor of being appointed to the task; cf. above.

80) Among the Syrians this was called *ṣabḥa* "breakfast" and was brought to the nuptial chamber in the morning after the consummation of the marriage. On this meal, which the couple eats either before or after the consummation of the marriage, see also Westermarck, *Ceremonies*, pp. 236, 244, 251, 253, 258 + note 3, 355.

81) See Tur-Sinai, *op. cit.* p. 335 and there references. The paranympth is called among some Moroccan tribes *āuzīr*, *l-uzīr*, or *uzīr*, i.e. "vizier"; Westermarck, *Ceremonies*, pp. 94, 97, and *passim*. On the significance of this term to our theme, see below pp. 00. In one Moroccan tribe the bride's paranympth takes care to bring her every day during the whole week of the marriage ceremonies a little bit from each of the foods eaten by the groom and the rest of the wedding guests, see Westermarck, *ibid.*, p. 285.

82) Westermarck, *History*, vol. II, p. 275; *Ceremonies*, pp. 204, 223, 346.

83) See Westermarck, *History* vol. I, p. 205 note 3, vol. II, pp. 526ff. See also *Ceremonies*, p. 396 index sub "Best-man."

It is instructive to observe that weapons, in general, and the sword, in particular, play a very significant role in wedding ceremonies in various places. Swords are carried by various people, including the bride and the bridegroom, during the ceremonies; but it is particularly true of the paranymp who carries a sword and uses it in various ways to protect the couple⁸⁴). It is, thus, reported that among the Palestinian *fellaḥīn* a man with a sword accompanies the bride in the procession to the groom's place⁸⁵). Sometimes the bride herself holds a sword while in procession⁸⁶). During preceding ceremonies, paranymps with drawn swords stand by the couple to protect them⁸⁷). In other places a sword or a dagger is put on the bridal bed, or a paranymp or a woman stands in the nuptial chamber with a drawn sword⁸⁸).

It is generally said that the sword is intended to guard the young couple from evil eyes and particularly from evil spirits and demons, which are believed to be in readiness to harm the couple, or even snatch the bride⁸⁹). The couple is believed to be in a very susceptible state in this stage of their life when they pass from the state of bachelorhood to that of a married couple. In such passage situations, it is believed that evil spirits are particularly bound to attack and harm the couple, and one then should prepare means to avert their bad influence (cf. Pop, *ibid.*).

The most striking, however, and, for the theme of this article, the most interesting role of the paranymp, as attested in the external

84) See in general Westermarck, *History*, pp. 499ff.

85) Granquist, *op. cit.*, p. 62; cf. Westermarck, *History*, pp. 499f.

86) Westermarck, *History*, vol. II, pp. 463, 499f. cf. *Ceremonies*, p. 152; Granquist, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

87) *Ceremonies*, pp. 123, 149, 155, 162; see in general p. 322 notes 16-18.

88) *Ibid.*, p. 251; cf. *History*, p. 501. Cf. also Cant. 3:7ff.

89) Westermarck, *History*, vol. II pp. 496ff.; *Ceremonies*, pp. 106ff. and *passim*; see in general pp. 321ff. and p. 322 notes 16-18; cf. Pop, *Song of Songs, AB*, New York, 1977, pp. 431ff. and there a discussion and extensive citations of related customs and beliefs from other cultures. It is interesting to note that in one Moroccan tribe there is a belief in a demon called "the kidnapper of brides," see Westermarck, *Ceremonies*, p. 160.

sources, is his serving as a witness to the consummation of the marriage for the specific purpose of attesting the bride's virginity. According to the Talmud⁹⁰), two paranympths were appointed, one for the bridegroom and one for the bride. They were supposed to spend the night with the couple in the nuptial chamber and ensure that no one tried to furnish false testimonies which would prove or disprove the bride's virginity. According to Karaite tradition⁹¹), paranympths were appointed and "entrusted with the bride's virginity" for the purpose of guarding her against any false claim raised by her husband in the future (cf. Deut. 22:13ff.). Besides being personally in the nuptial chamber at the time of consummating the marriage, the paranympths were supposed to keep at their disposal the blood stained dress of the bride for future need⁹²). R. Jehuda Hadasi relates in his treatise (*op. cit.*) that the dress used to be sealed at the presence of the court and witnesses on its four corners with the paranympth's seal and then put on the bed to receive the virginity blood. This sealed dress was later produced as a proof against any claim that might be raised against the bride's chastity.

The *šebîn* in the Syrian wedding, who brought the *ṣabḥa* "breakfast" to the bridal couple in the morning after, was supposed to hear from the bridegroom that the wedding week was going to be held according to tradition. That meant that the bride had been found virgin, otherwise the marriage would have immediately been terminated. The same *šebîn* was supposed to exhibit the blood stained cloth in front of the wedding guests, organized as a mock law court⁹³), thus proving the bride's virginity to the satisfaction of all present.

90) *Tosefta K'tūbōt* 1d, *Babli, ibid.* 12a.

91) See R. Aaron ben Eliahu the Karaite (lived around 1300 A.D.) in his treatise *Gan Eden*, pp. 151a, 158b; cf. another Karaite philosopher, R. Jehuda Hadasi in his treatise *Eshkol Hakkofer* (written in the year 1048 A.D.), p. 141a-b.

92) See the above cited Karaite sources and the Biblical reference from Deut. which proves the antiquity of this custom; cf. *Midrash Tanḥuma, Qorah*, par. 8; cf. Granquist, *op. cit.*, p. 128 note 3.

93) On the significance of this law court, see more below p. 267.

Among some Moroccan tribes, it is reported that the paranymp sleeps near the nuptial chamber, and thus he is ready to perform any service for the couple⁹⁴). In one tribe he is actually present in the nuptial chamber and witnesses the actual consummation of the marriage, albeit with his back to the couple⁹⁵). When the bride is found virgin, the paranymp announces the news by firing his rifle⁹⁶). In other tribes the bride's virginity is not held to be of major importance, and if the bride is not found virgin some cock blood is produced and sprinkled on her garment to save face. In one case it is reported that the paranymp actually helps produce this false evidence⁹⁷). In any case, the bride's blood stained chemise or drawers are usually publicly exhibited⁹⁸).

This specific role of the paranymp as a witness to the bride's virginity and as a keeper of her "testimonies" (see *Midrash Tanḥuma, Qorah*, par. 8) reflects two other interesting aspects of his role which are explicitly documented in part of the evidence under review. The first aspect or corollary of this specific role is the close intimacy created thereby between the bride and her paranymp, which could, and did at times, result in illicit behaviour between the two. The Talmud is clearly aware of this danger presented as a viable possibility, and in one case (*Babli Giṭin* 57a) it is reported that a husband, who wished to divorce his wife without paying her the sum of her *ketubbā*, tried to accuse her of an illicit behaviour with the paranymp⁹⁹).

In certain Moroccan tribes the bride is said to be in very intimate terms with her paranymp, which would seem very strange to an out-

94) Usually he is there to be ready to help the bridegroom overcome the bride's reluctance to comply with his desires, sometimes even by tying her hands and feet or by beating her; see Westermarck, *Ceremonies*, pp. 235, 239ff., and *passim*.

95) See Westermarck, *ibid.*, pp. 248, 265, 273; cf. *idem*, *History*, vol. I, p. 205 note 3, vol. II pp. 526f.

96) *Ceremonies*, pp. 233, 236f. and *passim*.

97) *Ibid.*, pp. 248f.

98) *Ibid.*, pp. 158f., 228ff., 236, 239, and *passim*; cf. Granquist, *op. cit.*, pp. 128ff. note 3.

99) Cf. Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie*, vol. II, p. 43 and p. 462 note 345.

sider. Thus, in one tribe the paranymp spends the whole wedding week very closely with the bride and lets her go only at night. Moreover, since it is considered indecent for the bride to be seen eating in public during her wedding, the paranymp covers her with his mantle, and both eat from the same plate using the same spoon. Sometimes he feeds her by pushing the food into her mouth. Finally, when she wants to rest, she may lay her head on the paranymp's lap¹⁰⁰). Another custom is reported for another tribe, according to which the paranymp is actually present during the consummation of the marriage and jokingly claims his share of the pleasure from the groom¹⁰¹).

The other aspect of the paranymp's role is his acting as a defender of the bride's chastity in the eyes of the public and especially against any future harsh step taken against her by her husband. According to the Talmudic and Karaite sources, it will be remembered, the paranymp was entrusted with the bride's "virginity," i.e., the blood stained chemise or drawers. Also, according to the Karaite evidence, the paranymp's seal was affixed onto the dress to be put on the bed and receive the blood. In case of slander, the paranymp had to produce this evidence in court and thus to discredit the husband's claim. The paranymp thus stood guard in this way to protect the wife's interests and to discredit any future claim to her chastity, especially such unjustified claims that would be raised by her husband. The paranymp's role seems later to be generalized, as a series of Midrashim from the Roman period depict him as a kind of interceder for the wife, who took care of her various interests and was ever ready to defend her against any calumny or against any harsh step taken by her husband against her¹⁰²).

It is to be noted that the paranymp's role as the bride's, and later the wife's, defender in court is reflected also in the Syrian custom of

100) See Westermarck, *Ceremonies*, pp. 240f., 273, 288.

101) *Ibid.*, pp. 248, 265, 273; cf. *History*, vol. I p. 205 note 3 and there also references to similar customs among the Abyssinians.

102) See a summary of these Midrashim by Tur-Sinai, *op. cit.*, pp. 338ff.; cf. Granquist, p. 128 note 3.

organizing a mock law court called *dîwân*, consisting of a *qâdî* “judge,” a *turgumân* “interpreter¹⁰³), and several sheriff officers. In the presence of this *dîwân*, the *šebîn*, now called *wezîr*, spreads the blood stained sheet as a proof to the bride’s virginity¹⁰⁴).

Another interesting aspect of the paranymp emerging from the sources under review is his appearance as an official who had to be appointed to his office. Thus, according to the Talmudic and Karaite evidence reviewed above, paranymps were specifically appointed to the task of attesting the bride’s virginity, and according to the Karaite evidence, the paranymp’s seal was affixed in front of the court and witnesses onto the dress to be placed on the bridal bed. In some Moroccan tribes, several of the groom’s friends compete for the title *luzîr* “vizier,” who acts as the head of the paranymps and appears in various capacities during the wedding ceremonies. This vizier is appointed by the bridegroom who chooses the one that bids the highest price¹⁰⁵). The bridegroom also appoints a vizier for the bride who should attend on her for the whole week¹⁰⁶), and sometimes the bride herself appoints her own vizier¹⁰⁷).

It is interesting that the title *luzîr* “vizier,” by which the paranymp is called among some Moroccan tribes (cf. note 81 above), appears also among the Syrian *fellaḥîn* (in the form *wezîr*), who, according to Wetzstein¹⁰⁸), used it to call the *šebîn* when he officiated in his capacity as the bride’s defendor in the mock law court (see above).

Both in Morocco and Syria it is reported that the bridal couple is held during the week or more of the wedding ceremonies to be a royal couple. They behave like a royal couple and they are treated like one,

103) Cf. *MSL* 12, 101:171 where the *targumannu* appears closely to the *susapinnu*.

104) According to Wetzstein, *op. cit.*, p. 291, this was a matter of life and death for the bride; for, in case the *šebîn* could not provide the needed proof to the bride’s virginity, she would likely be put to death by her family.

105) Westermarck, *Ceremonies*, p. 106.

106) *Ibid.*, p. 273.

107) *Ibid.*, p. 151.

108) *Z. für Ethnologie*, 5, pp. 288ff.

and this includes not only being dressed and honored as fit a royal couple, but also having a full retinue of officials and dignitaries acting and behaving the whole period as real courtiers¹⁰⁹). The paranymp too is considered a member of this retinue, having a specific and defined place in it, usually as the head of the groom's best-men in Morocco, and in Syria as a recognized officer of the mock law court¹¹⁰).

To summarize the role and functions of the paranymp as they are depicted in the reviewed external sources, this was a person or persons appointed by the groom, the bride, or the authorities, usually from the groom's best and closest friends, to attend on the couple during the wedding ceremonies and render various services. These included bringing presents, serving the couple with food, keeping company with them, guarding them, and especially the bride, against the surrounding people and in particular against demons and evil spirits, and more. With regard to the bride, her paranymp had the important task of attesting her virginity and keeping at his disposal the tangible proof for future need. As such, he acted as her defendor, ready to stand at her side whenever her chastity was at stake. This specific role of the paranymp placed him in very intimate terms with the bride, which could and did at times lead to an illicit behaviour between the two. Finally, the paranymp was usually appointed to his office, paid for it, and was considered an official of defined and specific role and place in the "royal court" of the couple.

VI. *The Cuneiform Evidence Reconsidered*

Returning to ancient Mesopotamia, one can hardly ignore the striking parallelisms which exist between the role of the Mesopota-

109) See Westermarck, *Ceremonies*, pp. 97ff., 113ff., 274f. and *passim*; Wetzstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 288ff.

110) The above mentioned Midrashim from the Roman period depict the life in the royal courts of the period, and the *šūšbīn* officiates in them as the patron of the king's wife.

mian niġir/libir-si = *susapinnu*, as incompletely reflected in the cuneiform sources, and the role of the bridal paranymp as attested in the external sources. One, however, is interested not so much in the obvious and self apparent similarities as in how the external, much fuller and clearer, evidence may help fill in the gaps left by the Mesopotamian evidence and explain it.

Of special interest is first the paranymp's main role as reflected in the external sources, i.e., his acting as a witness to the bride's virginity which entailed his admittance into the nuptial chamber. The question is whether one should postulate such a role also for the Mesopotamian niġir/libir-si = *susapinnu*. It should be noted how the external evidence illuminates and supplements the Mesopotamian evidence which depicts the niġir/libir-si = *susapinnu* in close and intimate terms with the bride in the nuptial chamber. There is, however, no explicit hint that the paranymp's admittance into the nuptial chamber in Mesopotamia was also for the specific purpose of his attesting the bride's virginity; but, one must admit, this seems to be an eminently reasonable assumption¹¹¹). In any case, as in the external sources, the Mesopotamian paranymp found himself in such intimate terms with the bride, that an illicit behaviour between the two was considered a viable possibility (see in particular no. 8 above). This explains the sexual aura surrounding the paranymp in the cuneiform sources, which seems to result from the very nature of his role as a witness to the bride's virginity, which in turn placed him in the nuptial chamber and in close relationships with the bride.

It does not seem that the *susapinnu*'s sexual aura is a result of his exercising the *ius primae noctis*, as was maintained by Lambert¹¹²). Indeed, among various peoples in the world, as reported by Westermarck¹¹³), the act of deflowering the bride could be performed

111) For some more support for this assumption, see the etymological analysis of the word *susapinnu* suggested below, section VII; cf. already Van Selms, *JNES*, 9, pp. 73f. who, however, suggested this hypothesis with reserve.

112) *BWL*, pp. 339f.

113) *History*, vol. I, pp. 167ff.; cf. *Ceremonies*, pp. 271ff.

by someone else than the bridegroom, either as a traditional right reserved for him, or as a service he rendered to the bridegroom, sometimes even for a consideration¹¹⁴). But there is no direct proof that the paranymph was charged with this task, nor is it clear that it emerged from the close measure of intimacy he had with the bride, of which he took advantage¹¹⁵). As to Mesopotamia, there is no proof to the existence of the custom of having someone else deflowering the bride for the groom. Also, the custom of *ius primae noctis* may have not existed at all in ancient Mesopotamia, as has generally been maintained on the basis of the famous passage from the Epic of Gilgamesh¹¹⁶), and so the paranymph could not have performed it¹¹⁷). The sexual aura which surrounds this person in the cuneiform sources can best be explained as a result of his licentious and illicit behaviour with the bride. To judge from the above mentioned hymn to Inanna and the *Instructions of Suruppak* l. 37 (nos. 7 and 8), this seems to have been a viable and ever present danger, which was a quite expected corollary of the very nature of the *susapinuu*'s role putting him in such intimate terms with the bride¹¹⁸). That sometimes paranymphs may have abused their role and broke the trust put in them seems expected and actually attested¹¹⁹).

114) Westermarck, *History*, vol. I, pp. 183, 190 reports of professional deflowerers in certain cultures who were paid for their services; cf. *Ceremonies*, p. 272.

115) Westermarck, *ibid.*, p. 273.

116) On the usual view of the existence of this custom in Mesopotamia, see recently Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, Philadelphia, 1982, p. 182ff. and there previous literature.

117) On the denial of the existence of this custom in ancient Mesopotamia, see most recently von Soden, *ZA*, 71(1981), pp. 103ff. who proposes to interpret the relevant Gilgamesh passage as reflecting the custom of the *hieros gamos*, Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk going to bed with the bride who impersonated the goddess Ištar/Išḫara; cf. also Tigay's remarks on p. 183.

118) The Talmud is clearly aware of this danger, resulting as it is from the fact that the paranymph was admitted to the nuptial chamber; see *Babli Giṭin* 57a; cf. Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie*, vol. II, p. 43 and p. 462 note 345.

119) Cf. Krauss, p. 462 note 345. It may be that such a breach of trust is the issue of LI 29 and CH 161, on which see Wilcke, *WO*, 4(1968), pp. 153ff.; *ZA*, 59(1969), pp. 77f. Wilcke seems to be right in seeing the heart of the problem in

The unclear function of the sword associated with the niġir/libir-si = *susapinnu* in Mesopotamian sources finds its clarification in the reviewed external sources, which attest the use of swords by paranympths for protecting the bride, especially from evil spirits. That this may also have been the function of the paranympth's sword in Mesopotamia can hardly be doubted. This assumption may be supported by the existence in Mesopotamia too of related beliefs of various demonic powers which were known to affect brides and grooms on their wedding and to thwart the normal course of events and the consummation of the marriage. It was believed that these demons used to snatch the bride or groom from her or his spouse's lap before they could enjoy each other¹²⁰).

Turning to the official aspect of the Mesopotamian paranympth, again the external evidence supplements the Mesopotamian evidence and clarifies it. The Mesopotamian paranympth may also have been appointed to his office, either by the groom, bride, or the court authorities, and it may be that he also paid for the honor of being appointed to his office. The external cases of paranympths paying, sometimes enormously, for their office, may help explain the reference to the *kasap susapinnūti* in the Akkadian document from Ugarit. This money may have been such a payment paid by a paranympth upon his appointment to the office¹²¹).

The niġir/libir-si = *susapinnu*'s being listed among such officials as the *šakkanakku*, *laputtû*, *targumannu*, etc. (see no. 4 above) is

the breach of trust between the bridegroom and his friend/best-man; the latter violated the trust put in him.

120) Cf. Finkelstein, *RA*, 61(1967), p. 132; see the texts edited and discussed by Lackenbacher, "Note sur l'*ardat-lili*," *RA*, 65(1971), pp. 119ff. Cf. the belief in a demon called "the kidnapper of brides" in one Moroccan tribe, Westermarck, *Ceremonies*, p. 160.

121) There is here, however, one difficulty, which does not seem to be surmountable: The paranympths in the external sources paid their dues to the couple, whereas the reference to the *kasap susapinnūti* in the text from Ugarit reflects a payment made to the crown, which in this case was transferred to the grantee as one of his privileges. See also next note.

paralleled by the title “vizier” carried by the paranymp in certain places, which is of administrative standing, and by the custom of considering the bridal couple a royal couple with its royal court with the paranymp being a member of it. Of interest in this context is also the Syrian custom of organizing a mock law court with a *qâdî*, a *turgumân*, several sheriff officers, and also the *šebîn*, called here *wezîr* (cf. note 81 above).

Although there is no clear evidence that the Mesopotamian paranymp was also a member of the royal court or that the bridal couple in Mesopotamia was held to be a royal couple during the wedding ceremonies, it may nevertheless be that the *niġir/libir-si* = *susapinnu*’s official aspect as reflected particularly in the lexical evidence is due, at least partly, to such parallel customs prevailing in Mesopotamia¹²²).

There is, however, one major difficulty involved in using the external evidence for explaining the official aspect of the Mesopotamian paranymp: In the external sources the paranymp is called a vizier and is considered a member of a royal court for only as long as the wedding ceremonies last, whereas the cuneiform evidence may be interpreted as reflecting a long term (public?) office of the *niġir/libir-si* = *susapinnu*. This difficulty may be solved by the Talmudic, the later Midrashic, and the Karaite sources, which show the role of the bride’s paranymp to last long beyond the bounds of the marriage ceremonies. It will be remembered that according to this evidence, the paranymp was entrusted with the bride’s *signum*

122) The seeming parallelism between the *kasap susapinnūti* and the *mudātu* in Ugarit, the latter being paid to the royal court by a person appointed to be a *mudū šarri/šarrati*, might reflect some relation between the *susapinnu* and the royal court. Another vague hint to a possible association of the *susapinnu* with the royal court may be gleaned from his parallelism with the *naṭṭaru*, both being depicted as carrying a “lap”-weapon. The relevant statement referring to the latter says: *ša giš.tukul ūr il ana é.gal KU₄.ME* “he who carries a ‘lap’-weapon enters regularly the palace.” One should note again the above-mentioned Midrashim from the Roman period (see note 102 above), which depict the *šūšbîn* as a regular visitor of the palace in his capacity as the patron of the king’s wife.

virginitatis, which he was supposed to present in court as a proof against any future claim to the moral chastity of the woman. The Midrashic evidence, furthermore, depicts the paranymp as one who was ready to stand guard and protect the woman's interests for a long time after her marriage. The bride's paranymp, thus, seems to have had a clear and officially recognized role in the wedding ceremonies, a role which lasted long after the woman's marriage¹²³). He could be characterized as a kind of appointed custodian charged with the task of defending the wife's interests with special emphasis on her moral chastity¹²⁴).

Returning to the Mesopotamian evidence, one should say that except for the meaning of a long standing office of the *niġir/libir-si* = *susapinnu* as emerging from his being listed among other officials, the evidence does not reveal easily the defending aspect of the paranymp as attested in the external sources, which would then explain his being considered a recognized official of long standing office and interests in the bride/wife. Here, it seems, comes to the rescue the title *naṭṭaru* which is closely related to the *susapinnu* in the cuneiform sources.

The close relation between the two is further strengthened by their both being depicted as carrying a weapon in their "lap." That these two officials overlapped to a considerable extent in their function can be gathered from other data. On the one hand, the *naṭṭaru* is somehow related to the *mudû*, which in turn is related to the *tappû*, both connoting the idea of "friend, acquaintance¹²⁵)." *mudû* occurs in the phrase *mudû šarri/šarrati* attested in Ugarit meaning "the friend of the

123) Krauss, *op. cit.*, p. 462 note 345; on the significance of this datum, see below.

124) This had a very practical reason, for should the husband have succeeded in his claim against his wife's chastity, he could have sent her away empty-handed, not to mention the damage done to her name. Among the Syrian *fellahîn* this could spell even death for the wife at the hand of her family; see Wetzstein, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

125) See *Maqlû* IV 80, mentioning in one breath *ibru*, *tappû*, *aḥu*, *itbaru*, *ubāru* (the latter is attested with the *naṭṭaru* in *LE* 41), *mār āli* and *mudû*.

king/queen,” which is probably the same as the Biblical title “the friend of the king” understood to function also as the king’s best-man¹²⁶). The *niġir/libir-si* = *susapinnu*, on the other hand, is related to the *ku-li* = *ibru* “friend,” both denoting paranymp, best-man¹²⁷). Moreover, paranymps were usually chosen from the couple’s best and closest friends, and in certain Talmudic sources the word *šūšbīn* has acquired the meaning of a loving friend¹²⁸). This idea of “friendship,” from which the idea and role of one’s paranymp is derived, seems thus to be a common aspect of both *susapinnu* and *naptaru*. The notion of protection, defending someone’s interests, which is present also in the *naptaru* (see below), would seem to be an understandable corollary of the notion of friendship. The two terms, thus, overlap each other on two basic and related semantic fields: friendship and protection, which in the case of the *susapinnu* materialized in the specific role of the bridal paranymp.

126) See Van Selms, *JNES*, 16(1957), pp. 118ff.

127) On the *ku-li* = *ibru* “friend,” functioning as the groom’s best-man, see Van Selms, *JNES*, 9(1950), pp. 65ff.; *JNES*, 16(1957), pp. 118ff.; Wilcke, *WO*, 4(1968), p. 154 and *ZA*, 59(1969), pp. 65ff. It should be noted that the pair of words *ibru* and *ibaru*, lit. “friend, comrad” exhibit a similar pattern like that of *susapinnu*, namely, they appear both among titles of officials (*MSL* 12, 61:776-7, listing only their Sumerian equivalents *ku-li* and *ku-li-li*, see surrounding lines) as well as among kinship terms (*ibid.* 105:25-26, see surrounding lines). On the question whether the *ku-li* = *ibru* denoted more than just the affectionate notion of a “friend,” i.e. that of the bridegroom’s best-man, as suggested by Van Selms (*op. cit.*), see Wilcke, *op. cit.* (especially *ZA*, 59, p. 77 and note 48, and p. 98). One tends to agree with the observation that in certain contexts the *ku-li* = *ibru* could be interpreted as the bridegroom’s best-man. As to the relation between the *ibru* and the *susapinnu*, since, as shown above, the Mesopotamian sources restrict the latter to the bride, while the former appears only with men, one tends to assume that the general term *ibru* “friend” was used to denote the bridegroom’s best-man, while the specific term *susapinnu* was reserved for the bride’s paranymp; cf. Wilcke, *WO*, 4, p. 154; and *ZA*, 59, pp. 76f.; Greengus, *JCS*, 20 p. 68; (contra *CAD* S 416b which defines the *susapinnu* as “friend of the bridegroom”). Some support for this assumption is offered by the etymological analysis of the term *susapinnu* for which see below section VII.

128) See *Sanhedrin* 3e; Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie*, p. 38 and p. 457 note 313.

The nature of the official called *naṭṭaru* has extensively been discussed with generally negative results¹²⁹). Without reviewing the whole issue afresh (see previous note), one would only like to call attention to Finkelstein's characterization of the *naṭṭaru* as a kind of custodian. According to Finkelstein, the *naṭṭaru* was responsible "for the well-being or safety of the things or persons placed or accepted into his care¹³⁰)." He himself seems to have enjoyed immunity, and anything placed under his care enjoyed his immunity¹³¹). This role of the *naṭṭaru* would conform nicely to the role of the *šūšbīn* as reflected in the external sources, namely, his role as a protector of the wife's interests, and especially his keeping in his hands the tangible proof which would render her in the future immune against any slander or third party claim (cf. Finkelstein in the previous note). Since the *naṭṭaru* is equated with the *susapinnu* in a synonym list, one then may assume that this was also an aspect of his role.

VII. Etymological Comments

Some comments on the etymology of the word *susapinnu* are in order. It was first suggested by Van Selms that the word *susapinnu* may be related to the word *šuš/suppu*, which designates some kind of loincloth (see *AHw* 1289a). According to him, this might have been

129) A thorough review of the available evidence is offered by Kraus, *RA*, 70(1976), pp. 165ff.

130) *AS* 16, p. 238.

131) *JAOS*, 90(1970), pp. 252ff.; see especially p. 253 note 46 where Finkelstein suggests that the *naṭṭaru* and *bīl naṭṭari* reflect the institution of "sanctuary," which in Mesopotamia was some kind of secular institution providing immunity for persons and things. Finkelstein's identification of the idea of protection underlying the *naṭṭaru*'s role would seem to be corroborated by two Sumerian equivalents of *naṭṭaru* in a lexical list, both containing the element *šeš* = *uru* = *našāru* "to guard, take care": 1. *MSL* 12, 142: 12a': *ga-an-šeš* = *naṭṭaru*, the Sumerian could be translated by "let me protect, defend" (cf. Kraus, *RA*, 70, p. 169); 2. *Ibid* line 14': *šeš-e-ne* = *MIN*. A third equation is *ga-an-duḡ* = *MIN* (*ibid* l. 13'; also *MSL* 13, 164:102), the Sumerian can be translated "let me open, resolve, render immune"; cf. Finkelstein's analysis of *naṭṭaru* from *paṭāru* "to render immune, inviolable against interference by third parties," *AS* 16, p. 238.

the “cloth on which the blood, which serves as a *signum virginitatis*, was received¹³²).” The title *susapinnu* may thus have been derived from the name of this item of clothing, and this may reflect the *susapinnu*’s role vis-à-vis the bride as described above and of which Van Selms too is aware.

Van Selms, however, suggested this hypothesis with great reserve, being himself inclined to follow a different explanation as to the origin of the word *susapinnu*¹³³). The present writer finds this hypothesis more convincing than the other explanations offered. One should first note that the derivation of the word *susapinnu* from *šuš/suppu* is supported by the fact that both are foreign words in Akkadian. The word *šuš/suppu* is a Sumerian loan word into Akkadian, while the pattern of the word *susapinnu* (with the ending *innu*) clearly betrays its foreign origin¹³⁴).

Further support may be derived from the exact identity of the article referred to by the word *šuš/suppu*. In an article devoted to several Akkadian terms designating both the human lap, private parts, as well as the garment which covers that part of the body, the present writer discussed also the term *šuš/suppu*, which, judging from its lex-

132) *JNES*, 9, p. 73.

133) Van Selms’s other explanation is not altogether clear to me. Basing himself on the form of the cuneiform sign *ni ġir*, which is that of a loin-skirt or girdle (thus Deimel, *Sumerisches Lexikon*, no. 347) and referring to Jer. 2:32, from which Kennet infers that “the unfastening of the girdles of the bride by the husband was a ceremonial act” (*apud* Van Selms, *ibid*), he derives the title of the *susapinnu* from the girdle (*ibid*, pp. 73f.). It is not clear, however, what should be the role of the *susapinnu* if the ceremony of unfastening the girdle was performed by the husband. For other etymologies suggested by other scholars, see *ibid*, p. 72 note 50. Add Albright, *RA*, 16(1919), p. 188, connecting the word *susapinnu* with Arabic *zaffa* “to step, walk, hasten” and relating it to the act of walking the bride to her husband. See also Edzard, *Festschrift Eilers*, p. 315; on the verb see W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* I³, p. 1236 *s.v.* *zāff*. Another etymology is that suggested by Tur-Sinai from the Š form of *wašābu*, *šūšubu*, denoting the act of seating the bride and groom under the canopy or in their house (*op. cit.* [above note 4], p. 336).

134) See Landsberger *WO*, 1, p. 371 note 69; cf. Otten, *StBot* 15, p. 15 note to no. 672/u.

ical equivalents and its synonyms, would seem also to stand for that specific article of clothing covering one's lap or private parts¹³⁵).

It is interesting to note that among the Palestinian *fellaḥīn* the virginity blood was supposed to be received on the bride's chemise or undergarment, which her mother changed in the morning by a clean one, taking the stained one either to be washed or to be publicly exhibited¹³⁶). The same is reported for some Moroccan *tirbes* where the bride's blood-stained *sārwal* "drawers" are publicly exhibited¹³⁷). More interesting is the Biblical verse Deut. 22:17, which deals with the specific issue of the wife's former virginity being challenged by her husband, whereupon her blood-stained *šimlāh* is produced to be exhibited in court to prove the contrary. It is quite instructive to note that the word *šimlāh*, which is usually rendered by the Aramaic Targum as *l'būš*, *k'sūt* "dress," "garment," is rendered here by *šušippā*! The suggestion, then, that the *šuš/suppu*-undergarment served to receive the virginity blood and was later kept for future need by a man whose title derives from the name of this very undergarment, does not seem to be far-fetched.

The foreign origin of both *šuš/suppu* and *susapinnu*, the identity of the first, and the Biblical verse where the word *šušippā* renders the Hebrew word *šimlāh*, combined together with the ethnological evidence of the bride's chemise or undergarment serving to receive

135) See "sissiktu and sikku—Their Meaning and Function," *BiOr* 43(1986), pp. 20-36. In the NA period and in Aramaic, into which the word is borrowed from Akkadian (in the form *šušippā*), it seems to have acquired other meanings such as "sheet," "table cloth," "towel," and more; cf. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic*, p. 104; see, however, the NA text *ADD* 679, left edge where a *sasuppu* is intended for the *naglabu* "loins" (see, Müller, *MVAeG* 41/3, p. 77 note to II, 17; Salonen, *Die Möbel des alten Mesopotamien*, p. 202); see also *OrNS* 21, p. 137:10 and *AHW* 1289a. It should be noted that the logogram ^{tu}gšU.SU.UB is common to both *šuš/suppu* and *sūnu* "lap/lap-garment" (see the above article). In this context interesting is the remark about the *susapinnu* carrying a sword in his *sūnu* "lap."

136) See Granquist, *Marriage Ceremonies in a Palestinian Village*, pp. 127ff.; cf. also her citation of Jaussen on p. 128 note 1, of Schmidt and Kahle in note 2, and of Burckhardt on p. 129 note 3 ("...her innermost garment..." Emphasis added).

137) Westermarck, *Ceremonies*, pp. 228ff.; 236f.; 239ff.; 245; 250f. and *passim*.

the *signum virginitalis*, would seem to support Van Selm's hypothesis that the word *susapinnu* is to be derived from the word *šuš/suppu* "undergarment" and it reflects the role of the paranymph in Mesopotamia which seems to have been identical to his role in other cultures and periods. The *susapinnu*, thus, was entrusted with the role of attesting the bride's virginity, first by being present in the nuptial chamber in the wedding night, and second by keeping at his disposal the bride's blood stained *šuš/suppu* to defend her against any future claim or calumny. His title was derived from this article of clothing.



Ishtar's Proposal and Gilgamesh's Refusal: An Interpretation of "The Gilgamesh Epic", Tablet 6, Lines 1-79

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Tzvi Abusch

ISHTAR'S PROPOSAL
AND GILGAMESH'S
REFUSAL: AN
INTERPRETATION OF
THE GILGAMESH EPIC,
TABLET 6, LINES 1-79

For Thorkild Jacobsen, beloved teacher and friend

Since its rediscovery in the nineteenth century, the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh has again captured the imagination of the literate public. The epic combines the power and tragedy of the *Iliad* with the wanderings and marvels of the *Odyssey*. The epic has reentered the mainstream of Western culture and now takes its place beside Homer and the Books of Judges and Samuel. I can hardly do better than quote the words of a reviewer in a recent issue of the *New York Times Book Review*: "The Gilgamesh epic is a powerful tale in almost any telling. Rilke once called it the greatest thing one could experience, and many consider it the supreme literary achievement of the ancient world before Homer. It has something of the qualities Henry Moore once said he admired in Mesopotamian Art—bigness and simplicity without decorative trimming. It is about nature and culture,

The substance of this paper was read before the 193d meeting of the American Oriental Society, Baltimore, March 1983. I have enjoyed conversations with several friends here in Boston, notably Thorkild Jacobsen, William Moran, Piotr Steinkeller, and Irene Winter, about my interpretation of the text. I recall gratefully also the various scholars who reacted with questions and observations during the discussion following the presentation of my paper to the AOS. I should like to express my gratitude to Peter Stark for his generous assistance and to thank Kathryn Kravitz for her help.

the value of human achievements and their limitations, friendship and love, separation and sorrow, life and death."¹

In the epic, man is addressed both as an individual and as a social being. The formulation is writ large, and the characters, feelings, and actions are exaggerated, for Gilgamesh is no mere man—he is Hero, King, God. The monumental form is an advantage, for by projecting human questions onto a colossus, the author is able to explore the human predicament more deeply and to formulate his answers with greater boldness and clarity. And indeed, the work does explore many issues; it provides a Mesopotamian formulation of human predicaments and options. The work examines the possibility of life in nature; yet, while it is not blind to the costs of civilization, it finally comes down in favor of urban life. It allows for the possibility of natural disorder but then affirms the political restructuring of the cosmos. But most of all, the work grapples with issues of an existential nature. Gilgamesh must learn to live. He must find ways to express his tremendous personal energy but still act in a manner that accords with the limits and responsibilities imposed upon him by his society and universe. Yet in the final analysis, he must also come to terms with his own nature and learn to die, for Gilgamesh is both a man and a god, and as both he will experience loss and will die.

The Epic of Gilgamesh (GE) gives voice to many of our concerns and fantasies. The depth and immediacy of its effect are remarkable, even startling. And its impact grows stronger with each reading. Occasionally, though, familiarity has a lulling effect, and we come to accept Gilgamesh's behavior without really understanding why he acts as he does: why he chooses a certain course of action and then performs it in a particular manner. We acquiesce until our attention is arrested by something that interests us or perplexes us. Some years ago I noted that GE tablet 6, line 16 was similar to a line in an incantation that I was then reconstructing; this observation suggested an explanation for some of Gilgamesh's actions in tablet 6 and set me thinking about the first part of the tablet. The main purpose of this paper, then, is to present a new reading of Ishtar's proposal and Gilgamesh's response in GE tablet 6, lines 1–79.² I hope thereby to

¹ W. L. Moran, "Ut-napishtim Revisited," *New York Times Book Review* (November 11, 1984), p. 14.

² For exemplars and composites of our text, see P. Haupt, *Das babylonische Nimrodepos*, Assyriologische Bibliothek 3 (Leipzig, 1884–91), p. 29 ff.; R. Campbell Thompson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Oxford, 1930), pls. 20 ff. and pp. 38–39; R. Frankena, "Nouveaux fragments de la sixième tablette de l'épopée de Gilgamesh," in *Gilgameš et sa légende*, ed. P. Garelli (Paris, 1960), p. 113 ff. For a partial layout, cf. K. Hecker, *Untersuchungen zur akkadischen Epik*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*—

contribute to a better understanding of the episode as well as to a fuller appreciation of the character of the goddess and of Gilgamesh. In addition, I shall remark on one or two points in the epic that seem to invite comment in light of the proposed interpretation: the place of the episode in the epic and the reason for the addition of tablet 12.³

I

Although the episode is well known, it will facilitate our discussion if we first set out the verbal interchange between Ishtar and Gilgamesh in summary form. King Gilgamesh dons his royal raiment (lines 1–5). Spying the king, the goddess Ishtar is struck by his attractiveness and grows desirous of him (line 6). She proposes to him (lines 7–21): pronouncing a marriage formula of sorts, she asks him to bestow upon her his fruit. In return she offers him a marvelous chariot drawn by powerful steeds, the fragrance of cedar upon his entrance into their new home, the obeisance there of rulers, their delivery to him of tribute of the earth, and the enhancement of the numbers and powers of his animals. In response, Gilgamesh speaks up (lines 22–23) and delivers a long speech (lines 24–79) in which he spurns Ishtar's offer. The speech divides neatly into three sections: (1) lines 24–32, (2) lines 33–41,⁴ (3) lines 42–79.

Sonderreihe 8 (Kevelaer and Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1974), pp. 181–83. There are many translations; I have repeatedly consulted E. A. Speiser, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. J. B. Pritchard, 3d ed. (Princeton, N.J., 1969), pp. 83–84 (hereafter *ANET*); R. Labat et al., *Les religions du Proche-Orient asiatique* (Paris, 1970), p. 181 ff.; A. Schott and W. von Soden, *Das Gilgamesch Epos* (Stuttgart, 1970), p. 50 ff. There are many retellings of our episode; one of the most interesting and sensitive readings is Th. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven, Conn., 1976), pp. 201, 218–19. My reading differs from Jacobsen's, and it may well be that our interpretations are mutually exclusive. Still, I should like to think that they may be complementary, each seeing the scene from a different perspective and playing it out on a different plane.

³ Elsewhere I hope to discuss the connections and common mythological background of such myths as the *Gilgamesh Epic* (GE) tablet 6, the *Descent of Inanna/Ishtar*, and *Nergal and Ereshkigal*.

⁴ E. A. Speiser, "Gilgamesh VI 40," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 12 (1958): 41, began his study of GE tablet 6, line 40 with the remark "the second stanza of Gilg. VI (22–44)—marked off as such by horizontal lines in the text. . . ." As noted above, I have divided Gilgamesh's speech differently. The separation of lines 24–32 from lines 33–41 is based, first of all, on the observation that each of these sections is characterized by thematic and formal features that unify it and set it off from the other. As for lines 42–44, I need only note that lines 42–43 look forward—they anticipate the accounts of the first two lovers in lines 45–50, and that line 44—following the opening questions in lines 42–43—contains Gilgamesh's own statement that he will now recount Ishtar's various amatory escapades and, so, introduces the recital itself. The horizontal dividing line after line 44 is in no way decisive; I suspect that it does not even exist. It is absent in E. Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts* (Leipzig, 1915–23) (hereafter *KAR*), no. 115 + (cf. Frankena, p. 120) as well as in Sm. 2112 (Haupt, p. 32) and K. 231

1. Much of the first section is broken, and it is difficult to ascertain its purport. The section is framed by the verbal form *ahhazki*; it treats food, garments, and toiletries. Gilgamesh seems to be saying that he is unwilling to marry Ishtar; while it is possible that he declares his willingness to bestow gifts upon her,⁵ it is more likely that he states that Ishtar has no need for the kinds of gifts that a bridegroom would normally bestow upon his bride.⁶

2. In the second section, Gilgamesh addresses Ishtar by nine kennings. One line is given over to each kenning. In each case, an object is first introduced and then defined by an epithet that describes or denotes a seemingly negative or destructive characteristic (e.g., *ekallu munappiṣat qarrādi*, "a palace that crushes the warrior" [line 35]).

3. The third section is devoted to a recital of Ishtar's dealings with six lovers. Gilgamesh recounts the story of each of the lovers and the destructive treatment that Ishtar has meted out to them. The section begins and ends with rhetorical statements (lines 42–43, 79). The final statement (line 79) refers to as many lovers as had been previously listed: "If you love me, will you not treat me as you treated them?" (*kī šāšunu*). Similarly, the opening two questions (lines 42–43) also refer to Ishtar's lovers: "Which spouse have you loved forever? Which shepherd bird kept pleasing you?" These two questions make actual reference only to the first two lovers in the subsequent recital. They serve as a stylized abbreviation and assume the full sequence of lovers.⁷

(Haupt, p. 38; cf. Thompson, pl. 21, nn. 3, 10). Outside of the Haupt and Thompson composites (Thompson, pl. 21; cf. Haupt, p. 43, n. 18: "Theilstrich."), I only find the dividing line in Haupt, p. 30 (= [?] K. 4579a; P. Jensen, *Assyrisch-babylonische Mythen und Epen*, Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek 6/1 [Berlin, 1900], p. 166, n. 2, treats K. 4579a as unpublished, but it seems to be the unnumbered text in Haupt, pp. 30–31), but in view of Haupt's procedure there (see p. 30, col. 2 after line 11), the horizontal lines seem to have been a modern copyist's device that was subsequently erroneously introduced into the edition. If so, there is probably no dividing line between lines 44 and 45; collation is required. Because of its fragmentary nature, I have not taken account of line 45 in the present essay.

⁵ Compare the translation of lines 27–30 in I. M. Diakonoff, review of *Het Gilgamesj Epos* by F. M. Th. de Liagre Böhl and *Epos o Gilgamešovi* by L. Matouš, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 18 (1961): 63.

⁶ Compare the translation of lines 27–28 in Labat, p. 182.

⁷ Line 42 (*ayyū hāmīraki* . . .) anticipates the Tammuz story of lines 46–47, and line 43 (*ayyū allalki* . . .) anticipates the shepherd-bird story of lines 48–50. The fact that the opening questions refer only to the first two lovers may be interpreted in one of two ways. It may reflect an earlier form of the text in which Gilgamesh limited his recital to these two lovers. More probably, it serves as a stylized abbreviation, citing only the first two lovers, but assuming the full list. I prefer this second explanation. The use of the device is known elsewhere. Here I should note that the use of a similar form of abbreviation explains, I think, the mention of only the "eye" and the "tooth" in the unit dealing with slaves in Exod. 21:26–27: instead of repeating the various parts of the body and types of wounds mentioned in verses 24–25, the writer cited only the first two. In

The entire episode is curious. Gilgamesh's refusal to wed Ishtar is strange. We tend to condone his refusal and to treat it as if it were a perfectly natural way to act. Perhaps we do so because we think of the goddess—especially when she is an initiator—as an aggressive and harmful woman; but on the face of it, at least, Gilgamesh has not convinced us of the necessity or even the desirability of refusing her. Gilgamesh concludes his speech by stating that Ishtar will treat him as she treated her previous lovers. But these earlier encounters are simply illustrative; by themselves they do not prove anything. They simply exemplify and assert a belief that Gilgamesh already holds. Why, then, did Gilgamesh arrive at this conviction and assume that his relationship with Ishtar would end like the others? The motivation for the refusal is not immediately apparent. Nor have we been prepared for a refusal. If anything, we have been led to expect a positive response on Gilgamesh's part. Gilgamesh has just overcome a male monster, a guardian of a treasure; even if we give credence to the possibility that Gilgamesh might have some ambivalent feelings about killing a male and taking a female, still he should now want and be able to claim his reward and take Ishtar. Furthermore, the Gilgamesh that we have met thus far in the epic is surely not the kind of man to fear a challenge or to imagine himself vulnerable to that which might harm a lesser being. If anything, Ishtar's destructive treatment of some of her previous lovers should spur him on. He should be tempted by the challenge that she poses and believe himself able to enjoy her

providing only for the eye and tooth of the slave, he intended nothing more than to save himself the bother of running through the whole sequence. It has been noted that the "[H]ittite] L[aws] 8, similar to Exodus, lists the blinding of a slave and the knocking out of his teeth" (Sh. M. Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant* [Leiden, 1970], p. 78, n. 4); this may perhaps be a necessary condition, but it is not a sufficient explanation for the formation of these verses. The composer understood "eye" and "tooth"—the first two entries of the standard list—as standing for the full list and left it to the reader to supply the rest of the list. Certainly, later readers have extended the mention of "eye" and "tooth" in these verses to include additional parts of the body. However, this shortcut has occasioned some misunderstanding, and to the writer's selection of "eye" and "tooth" has been imputed a significance that was probably not intended. So understandably the Babylonian Talmud *Qiddushin* 24^{a-b} and the Halakhic Midrashim (*Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. J. Z. Lauterbach [Philadelphia, 1935], 3:72–73; and *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Šimon b. Joḥai*, ed. J. N. Epstein and E. Z. Melamed [Jerusalem, 1955], p. 177) followed by such medievals as Rashi *ad* Exod. 21:26 and the East European Rabbinic scholar Baruch Epstein (*Torah Temimah*); but also more recently and less understandably, e.g., M. D. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem, 1951) [Hebrew], p. 193; and B. S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Philadelphia, 1974), pp. 472–73: "A clear example of the new Hebrew stamp on old material emerges in the law which follows, vv. 26 f. If a master injures his slave, whether in a serious way with the loss of an eye, or with the insignificant loss of a tooth, the slave is to be freed. Obviously the law is seeking to prevent any kind of mistreatment toward slaves by lumping all injuries together without distinction" (italics mine).

without submitting to her powers. He can beat her at her own game. Moreover, the composer has not prepared us for knee-jerk misogyny; up to this point, at least, the relationship of Enkidu and Shamḫat has led us in the opposite direction. Finally, Ishtar is a goddess, and on the face of it, her offer does indeed seem attractive: status, power, wealth, and the goddess herself are Gilgamesh's for the taking.

Turning to Gilgamesh's speech, we notice immediately that it is rather long. It fills close to sixty of the seventy-nine lines of the section; by contrast, Ishtar's speech takes up only fifteen lines. Moreover his speech does not ramble as might a violent emotional response;⁸ for all its length and detail, it is organized in a clear and coherent fashion. Surely Gilgamesh's refusal could have been stated in a shorter and simpler form. The first section (nine lines), certainly the first two sections (two sections of nine lines each), should have sufficed to convey his refusal. And as regards the third section, what is achieved by listing more than, say, two lovers? To the extent that the opening rhetorical question could be limited to the first two lovers, so the recital could also be so limited. For that matter, the composer could have limited himself to the rhetorical frame of this third section; by itself, the frame manages to convey the unfaithfulness of Ishtar. Such observations indicate that we do not yet appreciate the full import of the individual sections of Gilgamesh's speech or the interconnection of the sections.

It is obvious, then, that we must provide an explanation for Gilgamesh's rejection of Ishtar as well as for the length, makeup, and purpose of his speech. The explanation lies—I submit—in the proposal itself. There must be something about Ishtar's offer that might disturb any man but would especially distress Gilgamesh, a being so very concerned about living and dying. There must be something about the offer that provokes the rejection, and Gilgamesh's speech must be a meaningful response, a response that takes off from the offer and returns to it. So in asking the question, Why did Gilgamesh refuse Ishtar's proposal and state his refusal in the form that he did? we are asking, What are the meaning and relation of her speech and his response?

II

We begin with the proposal. What did Gilgamesh see in Ishtar's offer that we have not seen? It is immediately evident that he is being offered something different from a normal marriage, for the animals that will

⁸ For a different opinion, see Jacobsen, pp. 201, 218–19.

draw his carriage are designated *ūmū* (line 12). They are supernatural beasts, animals that are not of this world. In fact, the marriage formula itself—*attā lū mutīma anāku lū aššatka*, “Be thou my husband, I will be thy wife”—points in the same direction and may well be a giveaway. Formulations of this sort in literary texts have served scholars as evidence for the existence and composition of the marriage formula.⁹ It has also been argued, correctly, I believe, that apparently both groom and bride recited separate marriage formulas—he said, “You are my wife”; she said, “You are my husband.”¹⁰ The marriage formula was mutual; the divorce formula, on the other hand, was unilateral—for example, “You are not my wife, I am not your husband.”¹¹ What seems to have been overlooked is that the marriage formula in the three literary passages that have been cited in support of the formula is also unilateral. Moreover, the identities of the speaker and addressee in these three texts must be noted and taken into account:

attā lū mutīma anāku lū aššatka,

so Ereshkigal, queen of the netherworld, to her future and forever spouse Nergal;

dam.mu hé.me.en ġá.e dam.zu hé.a
*attā lū aššatu anāku lū mutka,*¹²

so the demon Arad-Lili to a human female;

attā lū mutīma anāku lū aššatka,

so Ishtar to Gilgamesh in our text.

The unilateral formulation suggests finality and control. The use of this formulation rather than the mundane mutual and the contexts of these offers suggest that the proposal has its setting in the infernal regions, that Ishtar is inviting Gilgamesh to become her husband and thereby formally to join the denizens of the netherworld.

This interpretation finds confirmation in line 16. For in this line, Gilgamesh is addressed as an official of the netherworld. That he is

⁹ See S. Greengus, “The Old Babylonian Marriage Contract,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89 (1969): 514–20, esp. 516–17.

¹⁰ See Greengus, pp. 520–22; and M. A. Friedman, “Israel’s Response in Hosea 2:17b: ‘You are my husband,’” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 202–3.

¹¹ Friedman, p. 202.

¹² For a recent edition, see S. Lackenbacher, “Note sur l’ardat-lilī,” *Revue d’assyriologie* 65 (1971): 126, lines 13–14. *attā* = *attī*; . . . -ka = . . . -ki; cf. Greengus, p. 516, n. 51.

being so addressed is strongly suggested by the occurrence of a similar line in an incantation directed to Gilgamesh. In this incantation, as elsewhere in Mesopotamian religious literature and ritual, Gilgamesh appears in his accustomed role as an important official of the netherworld.¹³ This Gilgamesh incantation is part of a well-known ritual.¹⁴ This ritual gives the impression of being far more complicated than it really is, in part because its purpose has not been adequately clarified.

¹³ For the netherworld role of Gilgamesh, see, e.g., W. G. Lambert, "Gilgamesh in Religious, Historical and Omen Texts and the Historicity of Gilgamesh," in Garelli, ed. (n. 2 above), p. 39 ff.; T. Abusch, "Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Literature: Texts and Studies. Pt. I. The Nature of *Maqlû*: Its Character, Divisions, and Calendrical Setting," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 33 (1974): 259–61; and Jacobsen, pp. 209–12. The Gilgamesh incantation was edited by E. Ebeling, *Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Babylonier* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1931), p. 127, line 7–p. 130, line 9. (Contrary to Ebeling's description of these lines as forming three incantations: "*Gebet an Gilgamesh* . . . *Beschwörung gegen Zauberer und Zauberin* . . . *Rest einer Beschwörung an Gilgamesh*" [Ebeling, p. 122], all portions are part of one incantation.) For a partial translation, see M.-J. Seux, *Hymnes et prières aux dieux de Babylonie et d'Assyrie* (Paris, 1976), pp. 428–29. As a result of the identification of new fragments and further joins (see next note), I have been able to put together a text of some eighty lines. Although there are now no gaps, every line of the incantation being extant wholly or in part, and we have a much fuller text of the incantation than that provided by Ebeling, some portions of the incantation are still fragmentary. This does not affect our use of the Gilgamesh incantation to elucidate GE tablet 6, line 16; the relevant line is set in a clear context and is well known: see Haupt, no. 53, line 9 = Ebeling, p. 127, line 15 = Lambert, p. 40, line 9. (The ten lines quoted by Lambert are also duplicated by E. Ebeling et al., *Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Assur* [Berlin, 1953] [hereafter *LKA*], no. 89 obverse right col., lines 14–22.)

¹⁴ This ritual was edited by Ebeling, pp. 124–33. I am preparing a new edition of the ritual as part of my reconstruction and edition of the Mesopotamian witchcraft corpus. To facilitate study until such time as the edition appears, I note the following "bibliographical" information based on work done on this text up to 1975. Ebeling's edition is based almost exclusively on the Assur pieces (a) *KAR*, no. 227 and (b) *LKA*, nos. 89 (VAT 13656) + 90 (13657). The Assur tablets were or should have been used as follows: (a) *KAR* 227: obv. col. I = Ebeling, p. 124, line 1–p. 127, line 50; obv. col. II = p. 127, lines 1–12, p. 128, line 5*–p. 129, line 10*; rev. col. III = p. 130, line 27–p. 133, line 75. (b) *LKA* 89 + 90 (89 forms the upper portion of the tablet; 90, the lower portion): Obverse: 89 obv. left col. (poor photo) = Ebeling, p. 124, lines 3/4–ca. p. 125, line 25; 90 obv. left col. = p. 126, line 41–p. 127, line 65; 89 obv. right col., lines 1–7 (the section of *KAR* 227 obv. col. I that would have contained these lines is not preserved) were omitted by Ebeling—they are to be placed between p. 127, line 65 and p. 127, line 1 (2. Kol.); 89 obv. right col., lines 8 ff. = p. 127, line 1–p. 127, line 16; 90 obv. right col. (poor photo) = p. 128, line 1*–p. 129, line 23*. Reverse: 90 rev. right col. = p. 129, line 1–p. 131, line 33; 89 rev. right col. = p. 131, line 33–p. 133, line 70; 90 rev. left col., lines 1–4 = p. 133, lines 72–75; 90 rev. left col., lines 5 ff. and 89 rev. left col.: these lines were not included in *KAR* 227. 90 rev. left col., lines 5 ff. were omitted by Ebeling (but see W. von Soden, "Bemerkungen zu den von Ebeling in *Tod und Leben* Band I bearbeiteten Texten," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 43 [1936]: 267), but Ebeling did include 89 rev. left col. on p. 133 immediately after line 75. For the catchline, cf. O. R. Gurney et al., *The Sultantepe Tablets*, vol. 2 (London, 1964), no. 254 rev.(1) 22. **Nineveh:** (My identifications and joins of unpublished fragments were made on the basis of F. W. Geers's copies; all joins are confirmed.) The Kuyunjik copy of the ritual contained at least three tablets. They are (A) K. 9860 + 13272 + 13796: K. 9860 + duplicates and restores Ebeling, p. 125, line 21–p. 126, line 34. (B) K. 6793 + Sm. 41 + 617 + 717 + Haupt, no. 53 (Sm 1371 + 1877) (R. Borger and I independently joined Sm. 41 + Haupt, no. 53;

Therefore, while this is not the place to present a detailed treatment of the ritual, we should at least state succinctly our provisional understanding of its purpose before drawing the Gilgamesh incantation into our discussion of GE tablet 6. The goal of the ritual is to free the patient of witches (*kaššāpu u kaššaptu*) and of the evil (*mimma lemnu*) that they had brought upon the patient. This riddance is accomplished by having them conveyed to the netherworld by means of an *eṭem lā mammānāma*, a ghost that had previously been deprived of the rites of the dead. Accordingly, (1) the approval and support of Shamash, Gilgamesh, the Anunnaki, and the family ghosts are secured; (2) the ghost is accorded the rites of the dead and adjured to carry off the witches and the *mimma lemnu* to the netherworld; (3) and, finally, the witches and the evil are themselves adjured to depart.

In the incantation, Gilgamesh is addressed in his role of judge of the netherworld. He is invoked by such epithets as *šarru giṭmālu dayyān Anunnaki*, "perfect king, judge of the Anunnaki" (line 1)¹⁵ and *šatam erṣeti bēl šaplāti*, "administrator of the netherworld, lord of the dwellers-below" (line 3),¹⁶ and is said to render judgment in the netherworld (e.g., *tazzaz ina erṣeti tagammar dīna*, "you stand in the netherworld and pronounce final judgment" [line 5]). The hymnic introduction of this incantation concludes with the statement:

*šarrū šakkanakkū u rubū maḥarka kamsū
tabarri tērētīšunu purussāšunu taparras*

[Lines 9–10]

To paraphrase the text: In the netherworld, Gilgamesh, you render judgment, and there kings, governors, and princes bow down before you in order to receive your pronouncements.

cf. R. Borger, "Das Tempelbau-Ritual K 48 +," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 61 [1971]: 80; K. 6793 + duplicates and restores Ebeling, p. 127, line 7–p. 130, line 10 (Haupt, no. 53 obv. 1–24 = Ebeling, p. 127, line 7–p. 128, line 30). (C) Sm. 38: Sm. 38 duplicates and restores Ebeling, p. 130, line 11–p. 131, line 28. *B* and *C* are definitely part of the same ancient copy of the text; probably also *A. Sippar*: Si. 747 duplicates and restores Ebeling, p. 131, line 38–p. 132, line 50. According to R. Borger, *Handbuch der Keilschriftliteratur* (Berlin and New York, 1975), 2:57, *ad* E. Ebeling, *KAR* 227, Bm. 98638 is also a duplicate of our ritual (identification: W. G. Lambert). Important parallel texts include F. Köcher, *Die babylonisch-assyrische Medizin in Texten und Untersuchungen* (Berlin and New York, 1963–), vol. 3, no. 231 || vol. 4, no. 332 and Si. 908.

¹⁵ For ease of reference, I follow the line count of the Kuyunjik text K. 6793 +; simply see Haupt, no. 53, and cf. Lambert, p. 40.

¹⁶ *Ḥā'it kibrāti* appears at the beginning of line 3 in K. 6793 + immediately before *šatam erṣeti*. However, it is possible that it should be separated from the following *šatam erṣeti* and joined to the preceding line (*rubū muštālu rappu ša ništ ḥā'it kibrāti*). This division is supported by Assur MSS (*KAR*, no. 227 and *LKA*, no. 89 set *šatam erṣeti* at the beginning of a new line).

The line *šarrū šakkanakkū u rubû maḥarka kamsū*, "Kings, governors, and princes bow down before you," recalls GE tablet 6, line 16. This is precisely the form of homage that Ishtar promises to Gilgamesh should he marry her, and she uses almost exactly the same words: *lū kamsū ina šaplika šarrū kabūtū u rubû*, "Kings, nobles, and princes shall bow down before you." In all probability, the composer of GE tablet 6 drew the line from the incantation tradition. But even in the unlikely event that the opposite is the case and the epic is the source from which the incantation derived the line, the use of the line in the incantation would indicate that also the composer of the incantation presumably understood the line in the epic to refer to Gilgamesh's place in the netherworld and would thus lend the support of an ancient Mesopotamian reader to our interpretation. In any case, the line has the same force in the epic as in the incantation. Of course, Ishtar intended Gilgamesh to think that the power and status she was offering him were to be his in this world; in reality, she was offering him the obeisance of dead rulers in the netherworld. She seems to be offering him, in fact, the very role in the netherworld that was accorded to him by the Mesopotamian religious tradition.

We would now read Ishtar's address in the light of the following thesis: Ishtar's marriage proposal constitutes an offer to Gilgamesh to become a functionary of the netherworld. The details of her offer may be understood as referring to funeral rites and to activities that Gilgamesh will perform in the netherworld. The order in which the items are cited may even represent a continuous progression: Gilgamesh the king will wed Ishtar and go to his new home, the tomb, the netherworld; there he will be accorded the rites of the dead and exercise his infernal powers. Our text describes a funeral ritual. Obviously our text makes use of figures and forms drawn from the realms and rituals of marriage, food and fertility, sexuality, and perhaps even political activity. But the unifying and dominant image remains that of the grave and Ishtar as its symbolic representation.¹⁷ We may now review the proposal section by section.¹⁸

¹⁷ To view the text as a funeral ritual is not to deny that the text can be read on other levels as well: as a marriage ritual, as a fertility ritual involving the giving of food, as a sexual ritual involving intercourse. But since the funereal dimension of our text seems not to have been noticed and remains unexplored, and explains, moreover, many features of the text that have gone unexplained, I shall focus on this dimension and attend to the others as they serve the image of death. Love and death are closely associated—be the relationship one of identification, opposition, or ambivalence—and the text takes this association for granted; it is Gilgamesh who must decide how and where he will situate himself between the two.

¹⁸ I am not unaware that I cite evidence from different periods in support of my interpretation of the text. In itself, this does not invalidate the interpretation. The uneven

- a) Lines 7–9: Come, Gilgamesh, be thou (my) lover!
 Do but grant me of thy fruit.
 Thou shalt be my husband and I will be thy wife.¹⁹

Ishtar invites Gilgamesh to become her husband and therewith to depart this world and take up permanent residence in the netherworld. The formula spoken by Ishtar is the formula used to introduce a mate to the netherworld. It is one-sided and implies a lack of mutuality. Whether it will take effect depends on whether Gilgamesh provides some sign of acquiescence and places himself under Ishtar's control. A relationship will be established and Gilgamesh's status will be transformed, then, if he satisfies Ishtar's requests of lines 8–21 and voluntarily gives over for consummation the food—vigor—of the living (line 8)²⁰ and travels to (lines 10–12) and enters into (lines 13 ff.) his new home. Note that only in regard to these three actions is a second-person verb form of request or command used: *qīšamma*, “grant” (line 8), *lū šamdāta*, “drive” (line 12), *erba*, “enter” (line 13).

- b) Lines 10–12: I will harness for thee a chariot of lapis and gold,
 Whose wheels are gold and whose horns are brass.
 Thou shalt have storm-demons to latch on for mighty
 mules.

Gilgamesh will be transported to the tomb by means of a chariot drawn by asses. The ceremonial and even supernal character of the

distribution of data aside, I recall an observation of M. P. Nilsson, *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology* (1932; reprint, New York, 1963), pp. 13–14: “In regard to these elements in Homer, derived from widely differing times and civilizations, scholars have divided themselves into two parties engaging in a tug of war. One party tries to put as much as possible in a time as late as possible; namely, into the developed Geometric and the Orientalizing periods, and to treat the elements which it is impossible to fit into this scheme as irrelevant survivals. The other party treats the elements which undoubtedly belong to a late age as irrelevant additions and takes Homer on the whole to be Mycenaean. It appears that neither of these two methods is the right one. We have to concede without circumlocutions that Homer contains elements from very differing periods and to try to comprehend and explain this state of things, not to obliterate it and get rid of it though artificial interpretations.”

¹⁹ With the exception of lines 15–16, the translation of lines 7 ff. at the head of each section is that of Speiser, *ANET*, pp. 83–84.

²⁰ The giving of food here has a twofold immediate connotation: the settling of a marriage gift by the groom and the surrender of the stuff of life. Food is both the source as well as the force of life. To give food is to give up one's life when the giver and the food are identified; to give is to spend oneself or to be consumed. Additionally, here, food and sexual force are fused, as are eating and sexual intercourse. The combination allows one to stand for the other or the two to be joined in mixed figures. In any case, to give food over to Ishtar effectively means to surrender the food that humans grow and eat in this world in exchange for the food that they are given once they are dead.

transport is indicated by the description of the chariot—a chariot of lapis and gold, whose wheels are gold and whose horns are amber—and the demonic nature of the animals that draw it: *ūmī kūdanī*²¹ *rabūti*, “wind demons, the great mules.” The transport is part of the funeral and will convey Gilgamesh to his new abode. In this way, then, Gilgamesh was to travel to the netherworld.²² Note Urnammu’s association with a chariot on his arrival in the netherworld (*The Death of Urnammu*, lines 74–75),²³ the chariots or wagons in the Early Dynastic tombs at Ur, Kish, and Susa,²⁴ the association therewith of asses at Kish,²⁵ and the mention of chariots and asses among burial offerings in presargonic texts.²⁶

²¹ For *kūdanu*, see *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (hereafter *CAD*), vol. K, pp. 491–92, and J. Zarins, “The Domesticated Equidae of Third Millennium B.C. Mesopotamia,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 30 (1978): 14–15, and note the description of Enkidu: *ibṛī kūdanu ṭardu akkannu ša šadī nimru ša šēri* / *Enkidu ibṛī kūdanu ṭardu akkannu ša šadī nimru ša šēri* (O. R. Gurney, “Two Fragments of the Epic of Gilgamesh from Sultantepe,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 8 [1954]: 93, lines 7–8 || Thompson [n. 2 above], tablet 8, col. 2, lines 8–9).

²² As with many burial offerings, the offer of a chariot may also have been intended to provide Gilgamesh with equipment that he had used during his lifetime and would need in the netherworld itself.

²³ S. N. Kramer, “The Death of Ur-Nammu and His Descent to the Netherworld,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 21 (1967 [1969]): 114, line 75.

²⁴ For Ur, see simply C. L. Woolley et al., *The Royal Cemetery*, Ur Excavations, vol. 2 (London and Philadelphia, 1934) (hereafter *UE* 2), pp. 64–65, 74, 78–80. For Kish, see P. R. S. Moorey, “A Re-consideration of the Excavations on Tell Ingharra (East Kish), 1923–33,” *Iraq* 28 (1966): 41–43, and “Cemetery A at Kish: Grave Groups and Chronology,” *Iraq* 32 (1970): 104, n. 96, and, esp., *Kish Excavations, 1923–1933* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 103–10 and references there. P. Steinkeller informs me that G. Algazi, “Private Houses and Burials in the ‘Y’ Trench Area of Ingharra: Kish” (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1980), pp. 27–35, has reexamined the chariot burials at Kish. For Susa, see L. Le Breton, “The Early Periods at Susa, Mesopotamian Relations,” *Iraq* 19 (1957): 122 and n. 2; and M. E. L. Mallowan, *Cambridge Ancient History*, 3d ed., vol. 1, pt. 2 (Cambridge and New York, 1971), p. 274 and n. 2.

²⁵ See Moorey, *Kish Excavations, 1923–1933*, pp. 106–10 and references there. While donkeys (in this note I use this term without prejudice as to whether the equid is a donkey or hybrid) are shown drawing chariots on the “Standard of Ur” (*UE* 2:266–73) and a donkey mascot occurs on the rein ring in Grave 800 at Ur (*UE* 2:78; pl. 166; cf. the onager rein ring also associated with a chariot in a burial at Kish [Moorey, *Kish Excavations, 1923–1933*, p. 106–7]), the animals attached to the wagons in the royal tombs of Ur seem to have been oxen (see, simply, P. R. S. Moorey, *Ur ‘of the Chaldees’: A Revised and Updated Edition of Sir Leonard Woolley’s “Excavations at Ur”* [Ithaca, N.Y., 1982], pp. 61–76). Note that the animals found in Grave 800 that were originally thought to be donkeys (*UE* 2:74, 78, 272) were later identified as oxen (R. H. Dyson, Jr., “A Note on Queen Shub-Ad’s ‘Onagers,’” *Iraq* 22 [1960]: 102–4). The significance of the use of oxen rather than donkeys in the burials has been discussed. Moorey, *Kish Excavations, 1923–1933*, p. 107, suggests a practical reason for the preference for bovids at Kish. There is evidence of equid burials without chariots; P. Steinkeller draws my attention to the recent finds at Tell Madhhur (J. N. Postgate and P. J. Watson, “Excavations in Iraq, 1977–78,” *Iraq* 41 [1979]: 176) and Tell Razuk (Mc. Gibson et al., *Uch Tepe I* [Chicago, 1981], pp. 73–74).

²⁶ See D. A. Foxvog, “Funerary Furnishings in an Early Sumerian Text from Adab,” in *Death in Mesopotamia*, ed. B. Alster, Mesopotamia 8 (Copenhagen, 1980), p. 67 ff.

- c) Line 13: In the fragrance of cedars thou shalt enter our house.

Gilgamesh will enter the tomb to the accompaniment of the fragrance of cedar (*ana bītini ina sammāti erēni erba*). Incense forms part of a funeral ritual.²⁷ Thus in a Neo-Assyrian funeral ritual (K. 164),²⁸ the corpse is laid out on a bed (*eršu*), a torch containing aromatic reeds is held (*ziqtu ša qanê ṭābi tanašši* [obv. lines 3, 19–20]), the corpse's feet are kissed (*šēpē tanašši* [obv. lines 6, 21]), and cedar is burnt (*erēnu tašarrap* [obv. lines 7, 21]). Note, further, the description of funerary rites in the inscription of Adad-Guppi. Regarding several Neo-Babylonian kings, she states: "I have been making funerary offerings for them, performing and instituting for them permanent incense offerings, abundant (and) of sweet smell."²⁹

- d) Lines 14–17: When our house thou enterest,
Noble purificant priests shall kiss thy feet!
Kings, nobles, and princes shall bow down before thee!
The yield of hills and plain they shall bring thee as tribute.

As he enters his new residence (*ana bītini ina erēbika*), Gilgamesh will be greeted and receive the homage of priests and rulers. They will submit to him and present him with offerings or tribute, gifts that the living give to the dead and that the dead offer up in the netherworld. Here in the netherworld, Gilgamesh will rule over the rulers. As noted earlier, the similar line in the Gilgamesh incantation establishes this setting for our line 16: "Kings, nobles, and princes shall bow down before you."³⁰ This same netherworld setting applies equally well to line 15. This line is difficult, and the text should probably be emended. A plausible reading is *išippū* (<*i*>-šip-pu)³¹ *arattū linaššiqū šēpēka*,

After hearing my paper at the AOS in 1983, P. Steinkeller informed me of his AOS (1980) presentation, "Early Dynastic Burial Offerings in Light of the Textual Evidence" and generously placed a copy at my disposal. Steinkeller discusses the Foxvog text and F.-M. Allotte de la Fuÿe, *Documents présargoniques* (Paris, 1909), no. 75. In both texts, equids and chariots are listed among the funerary furnishings.

²⁷ Is there any connection between this use of incense and its use in Adonis rituals? For its use in the latter and the Near Eastern connections thereof, cf. W. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979), p. 106, and reference in p. 192, n. 7.

²⁸ See W. von Soden, "Aus einem Ersatzopferitual für den assyrischen Hof," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 45 (1939): 42 ff.; cf. E. Dhorme, "Rituel funéraire assyrien," *Revue d'assyriologie* 38 (1941): 57–66.

²⁹ C. J. Gadd, "The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus," *Anatolian Studies* 8 (1958), p. 50, col. 3, lines 1–4; translation of A. L. Oppenheim, *ANET*, p. 561.

³⁰ We interpret the line as referring to the homage by dead rulers. It may allude also to acts of homage accorded the dead Gilgamesh by living rulers; cf. Gadd, p. 52, lines 20–21.

³¹ *CAD*, vol. A/2, p. 239; cf. Labat (n. 2 above), p. 182.

"May the noble purificant priests kiss your feet."³² The *išippu*-priests of line 15 certainly provide an apt parallel to the rulers of line 16; one notes the several priests and rulers that Enkidu encountered in the netherworld in tablet 7, column 4, lines 40 ff. and the appearance among them of the same *išippu*-priests (line 47). The kissing of the feet of line 15 takes place after death. The mention of the rite of kissing the feet of the corpse (*šēpē tanaššiq*) alongside incense in the epic and in the aforementioned Neo-Assyrian funeral ritual indicates that line 15 is set in a funeral context.³³ This is confirmed by the description of the funeral rites for Enkidu in tablet 7, column 3, lines 40 ff. and tablet 8, column 3, lines 1 ff.; there in addresses to Enkidu by Shamash (tablet 7) and Gilgamesh (tablet 8), we learn that Gilgamesh lays out the dead Enkidu on a litter (*mayyālu*) comparable, I should think, to the bed (*eršu*) of the Neo-Assyrian ritual, and that *malḫū ša qaqqari unaššaḳū šēpēka*, "Princes of the earth kiss your feet" (tablet 7, col. 3, line 44; tablet 8, col. 3, line 3). Kissing the feet in tablet 6, line 15, the bowing down in line 16, and the offerings of tribute in line 17 combine—individually or in combination—the meanings of acts performed at funerals and acts of obeisance accorded a ruler, here a master of the netherworld who receives the homage of his infernal subjects.

e) Lines 18–21: Thy goats shall cast triplets, thy sheep twins, etc.

With his settlement in the netherworld, Gilgamesh will become the possessor of vigorous herds, and they will become his embodiment.

³² The emended reading—however attractive—is not absolutely certain. It is possible that our interpretation of Ishtar's speech provides an explanation for *sippu*. Lines 13–14 treat the act of entering into a chamber (*ana bītini ina erēbika . . .*). The entrance way is "the boundary. . . . Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world. . . . [and] the rites carried out on the threshold itself are transition rites" (A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* [Chicago, 1960], p. 20). Since entering the chamber here in GE tablet 6 is the central act of the passing from the world of the living to that of the dead, one might well expect the very act of passing over to be concretized. The unemended form of line 15 can fulfill the terms of this requirement. Perhaps, then, we should retain *sippu* and view the door frame's kissing of Gilgamesh's feet as a rite of transition: the tomb is animated, and the dying Gilgamesh is greeted and drawn into his new home by its entrance way. Additionally, submission and acceptance of his rule by his new domain—a theme further developed by *lū kamsū*—could thus be symbolized. For the present, however, I think it wiser to follow the emended reading.

³³ Perhaps we should connect the kissing of the feet with the holding of the aromatic torch rather than with the burning of cedar, yielding the order: aromatics, greeting and submission, offering (GE tablet 6, lines 13, 15–16, 17 || [= parallels] K. 164: 3a = 19b–20a, 6a = 21a, 7a = 21b). Note that the burning of cedar in the funeral ritual may represent the beginning of a meal: "Elle procède maintenant à une série d'actions destinées à procurer au mort sa subsistance, jusqu'à la mise au tombeau: 'Elle brûle du cèdre, dans du vin elle l'éteint; . . .' Le cèdre est brûlé pour renforcer l'arome et la force du vin" (Dhorme, p. 61).

Perhaps this power is activated by the offerings of tribute (line 17). In any case, Gilgamesh will serve as a source of fertility, a power not unusual in one who resides in the earth.

Ishtar offers token and substance: honor, power, wealth. Here she intended to deceive Gilgamesh; she presented their marriage as if it were this-worldly whereas actually it would lead directly to his transference to the netherworld. Such a stratagem requires that her words admit of more than one meaning. She takes advantage of the similarities of the behavior of, and the treatment accorded to, rulers of the living and rulers of the dead.³⁴ Even more important—perhaps central to the deception—are the similarities of a psychological, procedural, and symbolic nature between a wedding and a funeral.³⁵ One need only recall that just as divorce may serve as a metaphor for ridding oneself of a demon and resuming a healthy state, so marriage may serve as a metaphor for demonic possession and entering into a deadly state. And the epic itself is aware of the association, as we learn from Gilgamesh's treatment of Enkidu at the latter's death:

iktumma ibrī kīma kallati pānuš

He covered the face of his friend as if he were a bride.³⁶

In large measure these similarities derive from the fact that both marriage and death involve leaving one state and group and entering

³⁴ For example, such acts of submission to an overlord as kissing the feet and bowing; see *CAD*, vol. N/2, pp. 58–59; cf. M. Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," in *Power and Propaganda*, ed. M. T. Larsen, Mesopotamia 7 (Copenhagen, 1979), p. 311; and R. Firth, *Symbols: Public and Private* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1973), p. 308: "Bodily posture is important in many greeting conventions. One mode of showing respect is by sinking to the ground, conveying a depreciation of the self and symbolizing humility and recognition of superior status."

³⁵ Underlying this aspect of the deception may also be the fact that death was the original outcome of the marriage of priest-king and goddess. But for the present, this possibility is best ignored. While it would be a mistake to dissociate our text completely from the sacred marriage, we should also not overestimate the latter's importance. Of course, in the composition of the early part of GE tablet 6, the author may well have drawn on texts or traditions describing the sacred marriage. (See, most recently, J. H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* [Philadelphia, 1982], pp. 174–76.) I find it hard to believe that our composer was reacting to the actual religious institution. The ceremony provided him with the motif with which to operate. See below, nn. 71 and 68. My reluctance to treat the text as a response to an actual ceremony is not dependent on the dating of the text. But the reader will certainly sympathize with my reluctance if my late dating of GE tablet 6 is correct (see below, Sec. V) and we proceed on the assumption that already the kings of the first dynasty of Babylon did not practice the rite of the sacred marriage (see recently J. Klein, *Three Šulgi Hymns* [Ramat-Gan, 1981], p. 33, n. 48).

³⁶ For the text, see Gurney (n. 21 above), p. 93, line 13 (= Thompson [n. 2 above], tablet 8, col. 2, line 17). Our translation follows Jacobsen (n. 2 above), p. 203; so, too,

another, with the wedding and funeral facilitating the transition. Thus wedding and funeral ceremonies have ritual elements and structures in common;³⁷ in addition, each may contain rites and symbols normally associated with the other.³⁸ And in regard to funerals, we find not only that marriage rites may be used to represent separation from kin, the living, and joining a new family, the dead, but also that sexuality and fertility may form part of, or even dominate, the symbolism of funerals.³⁹

So the emphasis on marriage and fertility does not contradict our reading of Ishtar's speech as a description of a funeral; it is precisely what we would expect to find. Perhaps it is the purposeful ambiguity of Ishtar's proposal that has prevented the modern reader from discerning its meaning. But Gilgamesh was not deceived; he remarked the allusions to the netherworld and responded in kind. Our interpretation draws support, then, not only from the specific allusions that we have isolated and the coherence that our reading imparts to Ishtar's speech but also from Gilgamesh's response; his speech contains allusions to the grave to the extent even of identifying Ishtar with a tomb⁴⁰ and makes sense only if he is responding to an offer of death.

Furthermore, it is reassuring to notice that Ishtar's speech conforms to the scheme of a rite of passage: acts of separation, transition, and incorporation;⁴¹ this should be the case if a funeral—a rite of passage—is being described. Gilgamesh is asked to depart his present state, to cross a threshold, and to enter a new group: Gilgamesh is to leave the living (lines 7–9); the transition (lines 10–17) begins with the hitching up of the animals and ends with the entrance into the tomb, the crucial or pivotal acts being the entering (*erēbu*) and the attendant greeting; the journey will be completed when he is integrated into his new domicile and assumes his new role (lines 18–21).

The journey belongs to Gilgamesh alone. No one moves toward him; only he is seen moving. Everyone else remains stationary. They are already in the netherworld. The rulers—his future subjects—await

Schott and von Soden (n. 2 above), p. 67, and Labat (n. 2 above), p. 196. For a different translation, see Gurney, p. 95, followed by *CAD*, vol. K, p. 299.

³⁷ See van Gennep, and cf. the references there, p. 190.

³⁸ For weddings, see, e.g., H. Schauss, *The Lifetime of a Jew* (New York, 1950), pp. 171–72, 212 ff.; and I. Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (1896; reprint, Cleveland, 1958), pp. 187, 204–5. For funerals, see, e.g., van Gennep, p. 152; and M. Pope, *Song of Songs*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y., 1977), pp. 210–29.

³⁹ See R. Huntington and P. Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 12, 93–118; and Pope.

⁴⁰ See below, Sec. III.

⁴¹ For these rites, see van Gennep; and V. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1967), pp. 93–111.

him; they will kiss his feet and sink down before him in submission when he joins them. He enters and they greet him; through their greeting a new relationship is established.⁴² Even Ishtar is there; she beckons him from the place whither he is asked to journey:

ana bītini . . . erba (ventive)

Enter here . . . into our home.⁴³

[Line 13]

She speaks from the tomb. Gilgamesh is asked to pass alone through the stages leading to death, to give up old relations and forge new ones. To join Ishtar is to die and become part of a new community. This separation and reincorporation find their most concrete expression in the giving and receiving of symbols of fertility. Gilgamesh's separation will take the form of the surrender of his cultivated fruit (*inbīka*) as a grant to Ishtar; his integration in the netherworld is represented by the grant to him of prolific and vigorous animals (*enzāitka . . . -ka . . . -ka . . .*).⁴⁴

Here Ishtar is the tomb. Her nature and behavior in our text are characteristic of a type of early earth goddess who is both the source of fertility and life as well as the cause of death and the receiver of the dead. Ishtar gives and takes power. It may even be that the juxtaposition of Gilgamesh's entry into Ishtar's underground home (lines 13–17) and the granting of animals (lines 18–21) is due to the double role of the goddess as receiver of the dead and mother or mistress of animals and/or to the identity or conflation of cavern and animal birth hut.

Gilgamesh understood the nature of Ishtar's proposal. She invited him to assume the role that would eventually be his, to become a ruler

⁴² For greetings generally, cf. van Gennepe, pp. 32–33; and Firth, pp. 299–327, esp. p. 301: "In general, greeting and parting conventions may be regarded as a mild variety of Van Gennepe's *rites de passage*—what Elsie Clews Parsons characterized as *crisis ceremonialism*, 'ceremonial to signalize or allow of the passing from one stage of life to another.' . . . Following her lead, one might coin the term *teletic rites*, from the Greek concept of *telesis*, putting off the old and putting on the new. One can apply this term to greeting and parting behaviour, where the major stimulation is provided by the arrival or departure of a person from the social scene."

⁴³ A further indication of the fact that she is in the grave and beckons him there is the difference between her address to Gilgamesh and her address to Ishullanu. Below, we shall indicate that the Gilgamesh and Ishullanu episodes parallel each other; here, let it be noted, therefore, that, whereas Ishtar desires Ishullanu and comes toward him (*īnā tattaššīšumma tatalkiššu*), she desires Gilgamesh and asks him to come toward her (*īnā ittašši rubūtu* ⁴*Ištar: alkamma* ⁴*Gilgameš* . . .): in the speech to Ishullanu, she is the subject of both *našû* and *alāku*; in the speech to Gilgamesh, she is the subject of *našû* while Gilgamesh is the subject of *alāku*.

⁴⁴ The significance of the sequence: fruit-animals and its relationship to Gilgamesh's response will be discussed below in Sec. IV.

of the netherworld. He could have viewed his washing and ceremonial dressing (lines 1–5) as a preparation of his body for burial. But he would not do so. In our epic, Gilgamesh appears sometimes as a character of unified will, sometimes as one whose will is divided between life and the absolute. One suspects that the Gilgamesh of tablet 6 would have seconded Achilles' response when he and Odysseus met in Hades in book 11 of the *Odyssey*:

"The soul of swift-footed Achilleus, scion of Aiakos, knew me,
and full of lamentation he spoke to me in winged words:
'Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus,
hard man, what made you think of this bigger endeavor, how could you
endure to come down here to Hades' place, where the senseless
dead men dwell, mere imitations of perished mortals?'

"So he spoke, and I again said to him in answer:
'Son of Peleus, far the greatest of the Achaians, Achilleus,
I came for the need to consult Teiresias, if he might tell me
some plan by which I might come back to rocky Ithaka;
for I have not yet been near Achaian country, nor ever
set foot on my land, but always I have troubles. Achilleus,
no man before has been more blessed than you, nor ever
will be. Before, when you were alive, we Argives honored you
as we did the gods, and now in this place you have great authority
over the dead. Do not grieve, even in death, Achilleus.'

"So I spoke, and he in turn said to me in answer:
'O shining Odysseus, never try to console me for dying.
I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another
man, one with no land allotted him and not much to live on,
than be a king over all the perished dead.'"⁴⁵

But there is another side to Achilles, and he may actually believe that in death he finds greatness.⁴⁶ Gilgamesh, in any case, moves between the realism, adaptability, and wholehearted commitment to life of Odysseus and the idealism, inflexibility, and inner conflict yet final embrace of divinity and death of Achilles. In tablet 6, however, Gilgamesh is like that side of Achilles that wishes for life; he is also like Odysseus, who cannot abide a permanent relationship with a goddess

⁴⁵ Homer, *Odyssey*, 11.471–91, trans. R. Lattimore (New York, 1965).

⁴⁶ C. H. Whitman thinks that neither Achilles nor Odysseus is speaking a literal truth in the passage just quoted. Achilles, for his part, "is emphasizing the cost of his greatness, the incurable sorrow of being Achilles. He is saying, I have suffered the worst, and identified myself with it; you have merely survived. And Odysseus, for his part, says: you are very honored indeed, but you are dead; I am doing the really difficult and great thing" (*Homer and the Heroic Tradition* [Cambridge, Mass., 1958], p. 180). For the characters of Odysseus and Achilles, see Whitman, pp. 175–220 and 296 ff.

of death. And further support for seeing in GE tablet 6 an invitation to a human male by a lonely and sexually needy goddess of the underworld—the home of the dead—to enter her abode and cohabit with her, thus attaining ageless immortality but losing human life, may perhaps be provided by the parallel accounts of Calypso and Circe in the *Odyssey*; on the Mesopotamian side, we note also the story of *Nergal and Ereshkigal*. Like Calypso, Circe,⁴⁷ and Ereshkigal, Ishtar is a death goddess. And Ishtar appears again in this guise in our own text when she involves the Bull of Heaven in her conflict with Gilgamesh. In the present context her association with the Bull takes on added significance. For, if we are not mistaken, the Bull of Heaven is none other than Ereshkigal's spouse Gugalanna; and the death goddess Ishtar not only makes her home—like Ereshkigal—under the ground,⁴⁸ but even seizes Ereshkigal's husband. For when Gilgamesh refuses to join her, Ishtar takes the Bull both as a replacement for Gilgamesh and as a tool with which to destroy him; finally Ishtar succeeds only in depriving Ereshkigal of a spouse and driving even this male partner to death and destruction.

Thus while Gilgamesh could have viewed his washing and ceremonial dressing as the preparation of his body for burial, he chose instead to regard them as life-affirming acts. He believes with the writer of Proverbs that "her house is the entrance to Sheol, which leads down to the halls of death" (7:27), and he is not yet ready to make the journey. We begin to understand why Gilgamesh viewed Ishtar's provocative offer with something less than equanimity. She threatens to deprive him of that which he most values—life—and offers him the very thing he most fears—death.

III

With the insertion of the Gilgamesh-Ishtar episode into the epic, the original Old Babylonian epic was transformed. But before discussing

⁴⁷ Regarding Circe and Calypso, see, e.g., R. Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Baltimore, 1955), secs. 170.3 and 170.8 (2:367 ff.); and G. R. Levy, *The Sword from the Rock* (London, 1953), pp. 149 and 152.

⁴⁸ Having mentioned Ereshkigal, I would note that several further indications—perhaps vestiges—of Ishtar's chthonic character are the very act of descent to the netherworld in the *Descent of Inanna/Ishtar*, the subsequent loss of human and animal fertility, and Ishtar's threat in both GE tablet 6 and the *Descent of Ishtar* to raise the dead. By calling Ishtar a death goddess, I do not mean to deny her other aspects. (For presentations of Inanna/Ishtar, see, e.g., D. O. Edzard, "Mesopotamien: Die Mythologie der Sumerer und Akkader," in *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, ed. H. W. Haussig [Stuttgart, 1962], 1:81–89; and Jacobsen [n. 2 above], pp. 135–43.) Rather, I simply focus on an aspect that has not been sufficiently noted and developed; note, moreover, that many if not all of her aspects (e.g., sexuality and aggression, war) relate directly or indirectly to death.

the transformation, we must make sense of Gilgamesh's answer. We turn directly to Gilgamesh's recital of Ishtar's previous affairs and of the harm she brought her lovers (later we shall deal briefly with the first two sections of his speech). The primary purpose of recounting these incidents is not simply that of pointing up her unfaithfulness or of rebuking her for treating her lovers in an unbecoming and even cruel manner. The recital is made up of six units; each tells the story of one lover: Tammuz, the *allallu*-bird, the lion, the horse, the shepherd, and Ishullanu the gardener. It may well be that individual stories go back to independent traditions.⁴⁹ But however anecdotal the recital may appear, it comprises more than just a simple or random series of unconnected encounters. Rather, as presently formulated and ordered, the six units form a scheme.

To understand the scheme, we must subject the recital to a detailed examination. The formation of the scheme depends in no small measure on the way the composer selected and set out his material. Accordingly, we may best begin our discussion by first isolating several features of the presentation; we organize our observations under the headings of style, order of lovers, and grammar.

Style: The first episode is short and lacks detail. Then, with one exception, the episodes become successively longer. In order of appearance, the number of lines devoted to each lover is two, three, (two), five, six, fifteen. The exception is the third unit, the account of the lion; this unit has two lines instead of the expected four. This deviation is due to an error of either textual omission or artistic commission, a conclusion substantiated also by the fact that the lion is the only lover of whom it is said neither that Ishtar established wailing for him nor that she struck him and changed his identity. Each story is less schematic and more detailed than the preceding one, with successive episodes providing increasing information on the interaction of Ishtar with her lovers. Moreover, whereas the first five stories are presented in simple narrative form, the style changes with the last lover; here dialogue is introduced into the narrative.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ In addition to Tammuz-Ishtar compositions, note, e.g., the passages alluding to Ishtar's affair with the horse cited by M. Civil, "Notes on Sumerian Lexicography, I," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 20 (1966): 122.

⁵⁰ After observing and working out the stylistic features, I noted the following remark by C. J. Gadd: "In the celebrated speech of Gilgamesh rejecting with contumely the advances of Ishtar (Tablet VI, 24 ff.) the tale of her ill-fated lovers (45 ff.) is evidently rich in allusions to stories which would have been largely familiar to the ancient audiences. As the line of six victims of her love and her caprice goes on, the stories tend to increase in detail, and the sixth, Ishullanu, has a veritable 'idyll' of his own, embellished with narrative, conversation, intimate detail, proverbial allusions, and even a moral, each, no doubt, with a background in folklore" ("Some Contributions to the Gilgamesh Epic," *Iraq* 28 [1966]: 117).

Order: There is a pattern in the order of appearance of the lovers. We move from the nonhuman to the human and from a setting of nature to one of settlement.⁵¹ The first lover is Tammuz, the personification of new life in nature. The next three lovers are animals: bird, lion, horse. Each animal is closer to the human, has more in common or greater contact with human beings than the preceding one. This is true as regards geographical location, economic function, and physiology or, at least, human perception of animal anatomy and personality. In any case, settled society comes into contact more with horses than with lions, and more with lions than with birds off in the forest. Even when we reach the human lovers, the shepherd and Ishullanu the gardener, we are still progressing along the same axis. The shepherd is on a line toward the settlement but not yet there. His camp represents an outpost of the settled community, a way station between nature and culture. We need only remember the role of the shepherds' camp earlier in the epic: to such a camp Shamḥat brought Enkidu to familiarize him with civilized life and thence he took the road to Uruk. The shepherd stands, moreover, between the earlier animals and the later humans as suggested by the place of animals in his story: he cares for sheep, offers lambs to Ishtar, is turned into a wolf, and is attacked by his own dogs. With the gardener, we move into the settled human community and learn of human familial relations; in part, Ishullanu is presented in terms of his relationship with a father (Ishtar's) and a mother (his own). The next lover is Gilgamesh. He represents one further step in the progression; with him we have moved on to a city dweller with a well-defined social role. It is no accident that at the beginning of his episode, immediately prior to Ishtar's proposal, Gilgamesh is depicted donning royal attire, and that, immediately after his refusal, the first reference to him by a third party—Anu—is as *šarru*, "king" (line 89).⁵²

Grammar: Shifts in style and progression from one lover to the next give the impression of movement and change; at the same time, the episodes seem to be intertwined with one flowing into the next, and so the recital also has the appearance of sameness and constancy. This appearance is due, of course, to the occurrence of common elements in the several episodes and the recurrence throughout of the same dominant theme. It is due no less to the composer's manipulation of the resources of lexicon and grammar: through the use of language, he

⁵¹ In the discussion following my paper at the AOS, Ann Guinan noted the possibility that the text may also be organized along a vertical axis and move from above to below (bird—*dallalu*). Additionally there may also be a movement from the world of the dead to that of the living: Tammuz in the netherworld; the bird in the grove—a secluded place between the world of the living and the world of the dead; etc. Is this a vertical upward movement from the netherworld to the normal habitations of human beings?

⁵² See Frankena (n. 2 above), p. 121, line 24.

conveys the notion that acts and effects of the past are carried over and forward into the present, that events continue from their point of origin to the point where Gilgamesh and the audience are located. This sense of repetition and persistence is effected (1) by the repeated use of such verbs as *râmu*, "love" (lines 42, 48, 51, 53, 58, 64, 79), and *maḥāšu*, "smite" (lines 49, 61, 76); (2) by the use of adverbs of time (*šatta ana šatti* [line 47]) and distributive nouns (*7 u 7 šuttāti* [line 52]; *7 bēru* [line 55]); (3) by the use of durative and permansive verb forms in the description of the final state of several lovers: *izzaz*, variant *ašib*,⁵³ *išassi* (line 50), *uṭarradūšu*, *unaššakū* (lines 62–63), *elû*, *arid* (line 78); and, most of all, (4) by the systematic use of iterative /*tan*/ forms⁵⁴ throughout the section: *bitakkâ* (lines 47, 57)—*bakû* G-stem, *tan* form, infinitive; *taltîmiššu* / *taltîmî* (*taltimmiššu* / *taltimmî*) (lines 47, 54, 55, 56, 57)—*šâmu* G-stem, *tan* form, preterite;⁵⁵ *taltebber<î>*⁵⁶ (line 49)—*šebêru* G-stem, *tan* form, preterite;⁵⁷ *tuḫtarriššu* (line 52)—*ḫerû* D-stem, *tan* form, preterite; *tutirriššu* (lines 61, 76)—*târû* D-stem, *tan* form, preterite;⁵⁸ *tattaššišumma* (line 67)—*našû* G-stem, *tan* form, preterite.⁵⁹

Our interpretation can be more easily followed if we preface our detailed presentation with a succinct statement of the manner and purpose of the scheme. The recital recounts a series of events each more finite in time and space than the preceding one and sets them out in a progression along past-present, nature-culture axes, each successive event beginning at a point closer to the time and place of the speaker. The purpose of the recital is to join Gilgamesh to the sequence but to place him at the very end, right at a point where something new may happen. Gilgamesh is set there so that he may be identified with and yet separated from those who precede him, so that his encounter with Ishtar may be located in the familiar context of enhancement, transformation, and loss but be so placed as to suggest that his encounter will end differently from the encounters of all previous lovers. The familiarity tells us that Ishtar's offer amounts to an offer of

⁵³ See n. 56 below.

⁵⁴ I note in nn. 55–59 below those instances where my grammatical analysis differs from that of W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden, 1959–81) (hereafter *AHw*).

⁵⁵ *AHw*: Gt.

⁵⁶ *Taltebber<î>* (line 49) is followed directly by the alternate readings *izzaz* and *ašib* (line 50). The /*î*/ 2 f.s. affirmative of **taltebberî* was lost because of the /*î*/ prefix of *izzaz*; hence *izzaz* is probably an earlier reading than *ašib*.

⁵⁷ *AHw*: G; the variant spelling *tal-te-eb-ber* excludes the analysis of the verb as a simple G.

⁵⁸ *AHw*: D.

⁵⁹ *AHw*: G; the variant spelling [*ta-at*]-*taš-ši-šu-ma* (Frankena [n. 2 above], p. 120, line 33 = tablet 6, line 67) excludes the analysis of the verb as a simple G.

death; Gilgamesh's appearance at the pinnacle tells us not only that he does not need or want her love, and the death that is attendant upon its acceptance, and that he will reject her offer, but also that he can withstand her anger and vindictive attack and emerge victorious.

This is only a summary and follows from our construction of the details that make up Gilgamesh's speech. With this summary in mind, we should therefore focus again on the features of style, order, and language and try to draw out the meaning and effect of these features: a natural backdrop is laid out, and a series of ever-recurring events is set in motion. The events start one after the other; as each succeeding event occurs for the first time, it joins a growing body of recurrent events that repeat throughout time until the present. (Suffice it to note the repeated use of the */tan/* iterative forms and the fact that the various episodes provide etiologies of recurring natural events.) Thus the wolf was not simply cut off from the sheepfold once upon a time in the distant past. Rather, once the shepherd is transformed into a wolf, he repeatedly and constantly tries to reenter, only to be expelled again and again. Obviously, succeeding events cover less time than preceding ones, so that, the earlier the event, the broader its duration; the later the event, the narrower its time span. Moreover, earlier events seem to range over more terrain than successive ones. I have tried to convey this sense by means of a graphic illustration (see fig. 1).

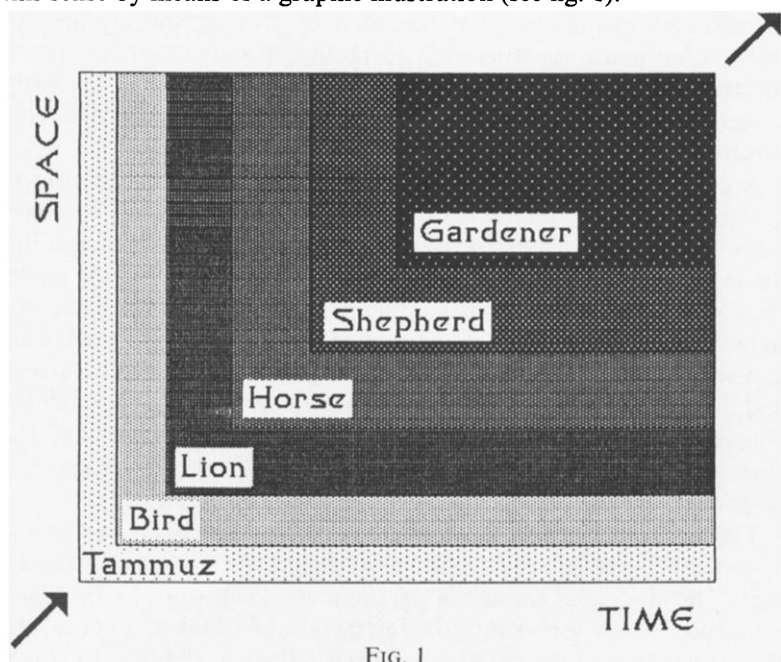


FIG. 1

There is a steady decrease in the temporal duration and natural space covered by each successive event, and attention shifts increasingly away from animals and the wild and toward humans and civilized life. Successive episodes appear closer in time to the present and in location to the civilized. As spheres become narrower, our focus becomes sharper; as the action comes closer to and operates more in the mode of the punctual now and the civilized here, the episodes become familiar and are presented in greater detail. Without giving up that which is common to the whole, we move from the universal to the particular, the particular being both an extension as well as the opposite of the universal; we move from the animal to the human, the country to the city, the mythological to the historical, the durative to the punctual.

The text creates the impression of duration or constancy by repetition, by the use of iteratives, and so forth. It also creates the illusion of movement from the past to the present. The characterization of Tammuz as the lover of Ishtar's youth (line 46) and the seriatim listing of lovers contribute to this impression but do not suffice to create it. Although we are never told explicitly that Tammuz was the first and the others were later, that the account is progressing from the past to the present, the text makes it clear that the events happen in the order in which they are mentioned: by starting with a schematic presentation, the text creates a sense of distance; then, by moving from the alien to the familiar and presenting each successive episode in greater detail, the text brings the story closer and closer to us. And as the story progresses, there is a growing awareness of change and sense of psychic involvement.

A circle is created with Gilgamesh touching his most distant predecessor, Tammuz, and his most immediate one, Ishullanu. We move from Gilgamesh to Tammuz to Ishullanu and back to Gilgamesh. But the text does more than just create a circle. Having created the circle, the text moves forcibly to break out of it, to move away from Tammuz, to build up to the story of Ishullanu, and then to use his story not only as a way of focusing again on Ishtar's original proposal to Gilgamesh and its meaning but also as a way of preparing the ground for Gilgamesh's eventual refusal and successful stand against attack. The story of Ishullanu and Ishtar leads us back into the larger story of Gilgamesh and Ishtar. In effect we have a story within a story.

The text moves from the mythological to the actual. Tammuz is Gilgamesh's mythic counterpart, but Ishullanu is his actual counterpart. The story of Tammuz is paradigmatic. The story of Ishullanu introduces a new aspect into the interaction of Ishtar and her lovers, thus transforming the paradigm. For Ishullanu is the first to whom

Ishtar is said to speak and the first to refuse her advances. The story of Ishullanu constitutes the first major break with the past. By presenting Ishtar's offer and Ishullanu's refusal and by the use of dialogue as a centerpiece to convey proposal and rejection, the story of Ishullanu and Ishtar becomes thematically and formally the direct literary precursor to the expanded account of Gilgamesh and Ishtar and to the extensive use of dialogue in that account.

Reading the recital of lovers is like traveling a road on which each way station is similar to and yet slightly different from the preceding one. Features are carried over from one story to the next; but the growing detail brings with it more and more change till finally we encounter in the Ishullanu story something really new and different. Here for the first time the text states that Ishtar raised her eyes and looked at the object of her desire (line 67) and recounts a verbal interchange between the goddess and the lover: inviting Ishullanu to make love to her, she suggests that they consume his vitality (lines 68–69); Ishullanu refuses, articulating his refusal in the form of two rhetorical questions (lines 71–74).⁶⁰

It is important to notice that the very features that set the Ishullanu scene off from those that precede it correspond to major features of the larger Gilgamesh-Ishtar episode:

1. Thus Ishtar's gaze of line 67 (*īnā tattaššīšumma*) corresponds to her gaze of line 6 (*ana dumqi ša ^dGilgameš īnā ittašši rubūtu ^dIštar*).

2. Her desire to consume Ishullanu's strength in line 68 (*kiššūtake⁶¹ ī nīkul*) corresponds to her request for Gilgamesh's vigor in line 8 (*īnbika yāši qāšu qīšamma*).⁶²

3. Ishullanu's first question (lines 71–73: *yāši mīnā terrešinni / ummī lā tēpā anāku lā ākul / ša akkalu akali pīšāti u errēti*) seems to correspond to the first section of Gilgamesh's speech (lines 24–32). In his question, Ishullanu picks up on the theme of eating introduced by Ishtar in line 68 and asks whether he should take up food that will spoil when he has already been fed; the food to which he refers is food that is offered to the dead and turns rotten. He does not want to eat the food of the dead. The text of the first section of Gilgamesh's speech (lines 24–32) is preserved in a fragmentary form; still it is at least possible that in these lines Gilgamesh picks up on Ishtar's request for a

⁶⁰ Although I do not agree with R. Labat's assessment of Ishullanu's response (Labat [n. 2 above], p. 183, n. 7: "Ishoullanou feint de ne pas comprendre"), I have no doubt of the correctness of his observation there that *ākul*—*akkalu* and *elpetu* in Ishullanu's response play, respectively, on *ī nī/ākul* and *luput* of Ishtar's offer.

⁶¹ For *-ki* understand *-ka*; the *i* is due to the following /*ī*/.

⁶² Note the sound play between words in the corresponding lines 8 and 68: *qāšu qīšamma* (line 8) . . . *kiššūtake* (line 68).

gift of food in line 8 and asks her whether it is not true that she has no need for the gifts—including food (lines 26–27)—that a bridegroom would bestow upon his bride and that by proposing to him she is in fact inviting him to lay out the offerings—including food—and appurtenances for his own funeral and burial.

4. Ishullanu's second and final question (line 74: *ša kuṣṣi elpetu kutummū*⁶³ a, "should reeds be my covering against the cold?") seems to correspond to the second section of Gilgamesh's speech (lines 33–41). Like lines 24–32, lines 33–41 are somewhat damaged and obscure; but even just *kutummīša* in line 36 and the mention of cold in line 33 suffice to indicate the existence of the connection with line 74. Ishullanu's remark in line 74 refers, I think, to grass as a covering of the grave or reed matting as a wrapping of the corpse; he does not want to be buried. In lines 33–41, Ishtar is addressed by nine destructive kennings. These nine entries refer similarly, I think, to the grave, its opening and lining, the covering of the dead, and funerary appurtenances. Even those entries that refer to parts of the burial also convey the notion of the grave as a whole. The individual parts adversely affect the corpse; in addition they also share in and add to the destructive force of the whole. In sum, the total grave described in these lines—the whole as well as the parts—does not preserve and house its inhabitant; rather it shrinks, squashes, and obliterates the dead body so that the corpse loses its form and is finally ground up into dust. Ishtar is a grave that may even betray the dead. Certainty is out of the question; but the interpretation here suggested at least makes some sense of most of the entries in lines 33–41 and lends a measure of coherence and unity to the list as a whole.⁶³

These correspondences highlight the importance of dialogue in the Ishullanu and Gilgamesh episodes. It is the dialogue between Ishullanu and Ishtar that is responsible for the length of the Ishullanu episode and for its increase in length over the preceding episode (6 → 15 lines); similarly the dialogue between Gilgamesh and Ishtar is responsible for the length of the Gilgamesh-Ishtar interlude and for the creation of an epic segment wherein a dramatic verbal contest takes over and pushes the straight narration of events into the background. Ishullanu and Ishtar acted and spoke like Gilgamesh and Ishtar. By reminding the

⁶³ *daltu*, line 34, opening of grave, the door that holds back or imprisons ([*ša i*] *kallū*) ghosts (*šāra u zīqa*) or the door that does not keep out ([*ša lā i*] *kallū*) the cold wind (cf. *šu-ri-pu*, line 33)—the dead are naked. *ekallu*, line 35, grave, netherworld. *pīru* . . . *kutummu*, line 36, cover of grave (cf. [?] *epera katāmu*, said of burying the dead) or of corpse. *ittū*, line 37, coating of grave. *nādu*, line 38, waterskin, travel provision for the dead. *pīlu*, line 39, lining of grave (cf. D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, Oriental Institute Publications, 2 [Chicago, 1924], p. 136, lines 18–19). *māt nukurti*, line 40, grave, netherworld. *šēnu*, line 41, footwear for the dead traveler.

goddess of the events that transpired between her and Ishullanu, Gilgamesh links the present with the past and recalls speeches from the past that prefigure and capture the meaning of the speeches presently being declaimed by Ishtar and Gilgamesh.

A systematic, line-by-line comparison of the two stories is instructive. All parts of the Ishullanu account seem to correspond to sections of the larger Gilgamesh account. The correlation between the two accounts is sufficiently high that we may even set out the shared elements in the form of an outline of the two stories (see table below).

OUTLINE OF SHARED ELEMENTS			
PLOT ELEMENTS	TABLET 6 (Lines)		
	Ishullanu Story		Gilgamesh Story
a) The hero is presented playing his traditional role: Ishullanu, Gardener; Gilgamesh, King. ⁶⁴	64–66	:	1–5
b) The goddess sees and desires the hero.	67	:	6
c) She requests his vigor, using the language of food.	68	:	8
d) In return, she offers him a reward: the opportunity to enter her and dwell among the dead. ⁶⁵ . .	69	:	9–21
e) The hero speaks.	70	:	22–23
f) He refuses the goddess. He states that he has no need for the materials—especially food—meant for those who die.	71–73	:	24–32
g) He calls Ishtar a grave.	74	:	33–41
h) The goddess hears the speech.	75	:	80
i) She reacts to the rejection.	76–78	:	81 ff.

⁶⁴ Gardeners and kings are associated; cf. W. W. Hallo tablet and J. J. A. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna*, Yale Near Eastern Researches, 3 (New Haven, Conn., 1968), p. 6. If some form of *dalû* is read in GE tablet 6, line 78 (see A. L. Oppenheim, "Mesopotamian Mythology II," *Orientalia*, N.S., 17 [1948]: 37 and n. 4, and reference there; cf. *CAD*, vol. D, p. 56, and vol. M/2, p. 58; and *AHW*, p. 1550), we note also the association of garden work (*nukaribbu*) and water drawing (*dalû*) in both the Ishullanu episode and *The Sargon Legend* (B. Lewis, *The Sargon Legend*, American Schools of Oriental Research, Dissertation Series, no. 4 [Cambridge, Mass., 1980], p. 25, lines 8–12).

⁶⁵ Vagina (*hurdatni*, line 69) = house (*bītini*, lines 13–14) = tomb. Here *hurdatu* and *bītu* are recesses in the ground and represent the place of burial. The linking of *hurdatu*

The stories are modeled on each other. Each story elucidates the other even if some details still elude our understanding and others have been grasped with only a minimum of assurance. The story of Ishullanu and Ishtar is a miniature; in it are condensed most of the important events and speeches of the story of Gilgamesh and Ishtar.⁶⁶ The Ishullanu-Ishtar episode is set into the Gilgamesh-Ishtar episode as a small room with a window is set into and looks out on a larger room that is similar to but not quite identical with it.

For much of their course the two stories correspond and run parallel to each other. But we must now note that, for all the similarities, there are also some important differences. Ishullanu's speech corresponds only to the first two sections of Gilgamesh's speech (lines 24–32, 33–41); the third section, the recital of stories of Ishtar's previous lovers (lines 42–79), finds no echo in Ishullanu's speech.

The third section seems to be a purposeful addition to a more basic bipartite rhetorical form. This recounting of Ishtar's previous lovers looks to the past and tries thereby to point up the significance of Gilgamesh's present encounter with Ishtar. The very act of reciting these stories, the similarity of Gilgamesh's story to these others but

and *bītu* explains the otherwise inexplicable */-ni/*, "our" of *hurdatni*: *bītu* and, by analogy, *hurdatu* are treated as "our"—our chamber, our vagina.

⁶⁶ Even granting that Ishullanu and Šukalletuda may be parallel or related personages (cf., e.g., Gadd, "Some Contributions to the Gilgamesh Epic" [n. 50 above], pp. 117–18; J.-M. Durand, "Un commentaire à TDP I, AO 17661," *Revue d'assyriologie* 73 [1979]: 164–65, esp. 165, n. 45; W. W. Hallo, "Šullanu," *Revue d'assyriologie* 74 [1980]: 94), for purposes of this essay, I did not find it particularly useful to draw upon the tale of *Inanna and Šukalletuda* (for this composition, see simply S. N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, 3d rev. ed. [Philadelphia, 1981], pp. 70–74 and 353). Instead, I have explored the relationship of the Ishullanu-Ishtar and Gilgamesh-Ishtar stories and tried to understand the place of the Ishullanu story in the larger Gilgamesh one. In retrospect, I can say that this approach has yielded good results. I should also note that I have not invoked the Sumerian *Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven* (MSS listed by C. Wilcke, "Politische Opposition nach sumerischen Quellen: Der Konflikt zwischen Königtum und Ratsversammlung: Literaturwerke als politische Tendenzschriften," in *La voix de l'opposition en Mésopotamie*, ed. A. Finet [Brussels, 1975], p. 58, n. 69) partly because I have followed A. Falkenstein's ("Gilgameš. Nach sumerischen Texten," in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, vol. 3, fascicle 5 [Berlin, 1968], p. 361) interpretation of the text. (So, too, e.g., Wilcke, p. 58; and Tigay [n. 35 above], pp. 174–75; contrast S. N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, p. 189, and *From the Poetry of Sumer* [Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979], pp. 74–75). In any case, my intention has been to explore certain aspects of the dialogue between Ishtar and Gilgamesh in the Akkadian epic and to provide an internally coherent interpretation thereof. If anything, C. J. Gadd's remark regarding a comparison of the *Šukalletuda* and *Inanna* and Ishullanu and Ishtar stories ("Some Contributions to the Gilgamesh Epic" [n. 50 above], p. 118: "If the comparison has any point it lies perhaps in the opposite conduct of the characters, especially of the goddess") seems to apply equally well to the relation of *Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven* to GE tablet 6. Thus, where Ishtar offers dominion to Gilgamesh in the Akkadian version, she denies him dominion in the Sumerian version.

especially to Ishullanu's, and Gilgamesh's own assertion that Ishtar will treat him as she has treated the others (line 79) all link Gilgamesh with the others and set out the background against which and the terms in which Ishtar's original proposal is to be viewed. The Ishullanu episode forms the culmination of Gilgamesh's speech. This episode directs attention back to Ishtar's original proposal to Gilgamesh and holds the proposal up to full view; it then recalls and recapitulates Gilgamesh's lengthy response and leads up to and asserts the final contention that everything—her offer, the gift she requests, her nature, her past history—indicates that, should he accept her offer, she will treat him as she has treated the others and deprive him of that which he values above all else. Here perhaps for the first time Gilgamesh speaks clearly and unambiguously and tells Ishtar—and the text tells us—that he understands the meaning of her proposal and that, for the time being, he has decided that he must refuse her.

What I find so remarkable about Gilgamesh's recital of lovers is how the "already" and the "not yet" come together; how retrospect and anticipation combine to create meaning and emotional effect.⁶⁷ In what purports to be a mythological context, we witness an awareness of dynamic time, of past and future, and an understanding of history and change. Having been forced back into the past by the recital of lovers, a sense of identification is created; as we move forward a sense of familiarity grows, but with it comes the expectation that also change is built into reality and that in the future something new will happen. The recital thus also directs our gaze to the future, and here we learn how different Gilgamesh is. The very fact that Gilgamesh is the only lover to show awareness of the existence and experience of preceding lovers and to recount their story, and the gradual but increasing emergence and accumulation of change in the successive stories of the lovers prepare the way for something new. As we come to the end of Gilgamesh's speech, we begin to realize that the encounter is not over; the speech will be followed by a confrontation, and the conflict between Ishtar and Gilgamesh will be carried well beyond the Ishtar-Ishullanu one.

Gilgamesh ends his account of Ishtar's treatment of her lovers, and his speech as a whole, with the sentence: *u yâši taramminnima kī*

⁶⁷ Compare D. Daiches, *A Study of Literature: For Readers and Critics* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1948), p. 83: "Literature, like music and unlike painting and sculpture, is dependent for its effect on the time dimension: a literary work of art expresses its meaning over a period of time, and at each moment—William James's 'specious present' where the 'already' continuously merges into the 'not yet'—retrospect and anticipation combine to set up the required richness of meaning."

šāšunu tu[. . .] (line 79). Alluding to the consequences of not refusing her offer, he makes a negative assertion in the form of what is either a question or perhaps, rather, a positive hypothetical statement of a condition unacceptable to him. He intends to say that they will not be lovers and Ishtar will not control his being. Here Gilgamesh anticipates the future by relating the past to the present; he intends his remark to conclude the episode. This last statement does indeed close the discussion, but, far from ending the encounter, it carries it into a wider arena. For while there is nothing left to be said between them, a reaction on the part of Ishtar is still called for and anticipated. (Note that Ishtar's reaction to Gilgamesh is introduced by a line—80—similar to one—75—that introduces her reaction to Ishullanu.) And Ishtar takes her cue from Gilgamesh's account of her lovers and his final assertion. This assertion has an effect opposite from the one intended, for it suggests to Ishtar the very plan of action that it was meant to avoid. She will treat his last question as if it were a statement and thereby transform a negation into an affirmation of the hypothetical condition. Even though Gilgamesh made no concession to Ishtar and entered into no relationship with her, thus not permitting her to "love" him, she will treat him as she had treated the others. To be sure, she will not follow her original plan of just gaining control over him and determining his destiny; now she will try to attack and destroy him. She had offered him a home in the netherworld; with his refusal she will transform death into an act and state of destruction.

Having been told how Ishtar has treated her previous lovers, we now expect an account of how she will treat Gilgamesh. A new chapter is opened, and our gaze is directed beyond the speech. The meeting of Gilgamesh and Ishtar must now be abandoned. She must respond to his speech; but by the logic of the situation further talking as well as the kind of one-on-one action appropriate to the Ishullanu episode are now excluded. She must move away from Gilgamesh and from the speech situation that has prevailed until now. Her response must originate elsewhere and involve additional forces; the action moves forward. Gilgamesh's refusal will have enraged Ishtar even more than Ishullanu's, and she must initiate an even stronger reprisal. Yet we are led to anticipate and hope for a victory on Gilgamesh's part even though Ishtar will mount an attack greater than any she mounted previously. Such is our expectation for several reasons; if nothing else we expect Gilgamesh to be victorious because in the evolving scheme of interactions between Ishtar and her lovers, victory is the most obvious variation on the proposal-rejection-defeat pattern of the Ishullanu episode. But until the fight we cannot be certain of the outcome. The tension is further stretched and suspense heightened by

the length of the subsequent dialogue between Ishtar and Anu and Anu's initial resistance.⁶⁸ Finally the fight takes place and Gilgamesh triumphs. This is what we have been led to believe will happen, and this constitutes one of the greatest differences between Gilgamesh and Ishullanu: whereas Ishullanu was the first to refuse Ishtar and Gilgamesh is now the second, Ishullanu was not able to withstand Ishtar's reprisal, but Gilgamesh is able to withstand the attack and emerge victorious.

IV

Although Gilgamesh has vanquished Ishtar, he will eventually learn that resistance is ultimately futile; death is part of life, though it may feel so very alien. In tablet 6, he is not yet ready to accept a new identity and assume a role in the netherworld. He is dominated most of all by the fear of loss. By modeling the Ishullanu account on sections of the Gilgamesh account and highlighting the similarities in their encounters with Ishtar, the composer has indicated that, like Ishullanu, Gilgamesh understood that acceptance of Ishtar's offer would lead to loss. Gilgamesh could not accept Ishtar's offer of marriage because he understood that to accept was to die, that Ishtar wished to deprive him of his life. He realized that Ishtar intended to deceive him by presenting their marriage as if it were this-worldly, whereas it would in fact lead directly to his transferral to the netherworld.

Recognizing in her offer the hidden promise of becoming a lord of the dead, he refuses and recounts the story of her previous lovers; their story exemplifies the treatment he can expect: first *enhancement*, then *transformation*, and finally, *a loss of self leading to frenzied but futile attempts to regain that which had been surrendered*. Ishtar is attainment but also attenuation; Ishtar is the opposite of what one values. To love her is to surrender one's identity. The free become domesticated; insiders are expelled; the settled are forced to wander; the living die;

⁶⁸ In view of my interpretation of Ishtar's proposal, Anu's statement that Ishtar provoked Gilgamesh and has only herself to blame for his response makes perfectly good sense; it is congruous to and follows from her proposal and Gilgamesh's refusal to accept his new role. Accordingly, I cannot agree with C. Wilcke's opinion that the Akkadian version does not recount Ishtar's act of instigation (Wilcke, p. 58: "An aber verweist sie darauf, dass sie selbst die Antwort Gilgames's herausgefordert habe, was aber in dieser akkadischen Version nirgends berichtet war.") In reaction to Wilcke's interpretation of *Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven*, J. S. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* (Baltimore, 1983), p. 13, n. 41, argues that it is understandable that Inanna of the Sumerian text would refuse Gilgamesh the right to judge in Eanna: "If, as in the Akkadian version, Gilgamesh had refused to do his duty to Inanna, then she had every right to keep him out of her temple." I cannot agree with Cooper's interpretation of the Akkadian text if his remark is intended to say that GE tablet 6 is simply an account of nothing more than Gilgamesh's refusal to enter into the rite of the sacred marriage.

and humans are turned into animals. Stability and balance are lost and are replaced by discontent, distress, and agitation. In proposing marriage, Ishtar offers to enhance Gilgamesh's identity while at the same time depriving him of it. Her proposal to Gilgamesh is an offer of power; it is also an offer to transform his living self into his dead self.

In tablet 6 the new identity that Ishtar offers or tries to impose is still conflict-ridden and untenable. Were Gilgamesh to accept it here, it would remain alien, and he, like the previous lovers, would constantly seek to regain that which he had lost and to return whence he had come. Such futile attempts to escape their new identities underlie the behavior of the other lovers. This is most evident and touching in the account of the shepherd turned wolf, for he will always try to rejoin the sheepfold and will always be chased away by the shepherds with whom he had once been almost identical and by the dogs with whom he is now almost identical. The similarity of the adversaries brings home the realization that absolute separation from those with whom one was and is closest is often the most distressing part of stepping over boundaries that divide the world into realms that touch but may not mingle; once one has taken the step one cannot turn back, even though the distance seems so very small. The contrast provided by Enkidu is instructive. In tablet 1, Enkidu at first acted like Ishtar's lovers and tried to rejoin the animals; he quickly understood that he could not and with Shamhat's help, he accepted and played his new role. But Ishtar is not Shamhat. Ishtar's demands on her lovers, their sense of loss and of being used, and the alienness of their new roles render Ishtar's lovers unable to assume their new identities wholeheartedly. And Gilgamesh can only assume his new role when he is prepared to accept his new identity wholeheartedly, for otherwise he will not be able to fulfill the functions of initiator, counsellor, and arbitrator of the dead.

For the composer of the epic, a limited, orderly, and, above all, civilized existence is the most that one can hope for. Only civilization provides accomplishments and forms that make life worthwhile; the building of cities, the transmission of culture, and the enjoyment of this life are the only values of normal human life. Yet precisely because he is civilized, Gilgamesh has the most to lose. The list of lovers makes us realize that Gilgamesh is civilized. His position at the very end of the list—and the image of Gilgamesh as king—place him at the very pinnacle of civilized life. The closer the lover is to culture, the greater the sense that a relationship with Ishtar leads to a loss of what one prizes and the greater the realization that one has very little to gain and much to lose from the relationship. Gilgamesh has the most to

lose—certainly more than any of the other lovers—because he is the most civilized and for him it is life, humanity, and a civilized existence that are at stake. Ishtar wishes to kill Gilgamesh and he resists courageously. From lover to lover there has been an increase in foresight and self-awareness and a growing belief that one can control one's own life. And Gilgamesh will refuse Ishtar and resist her offer to enter the netherworld until he himself can define his new identity and grow into it.

Here I must emphasize that it would be an oversimplification to say that Gilgamesh refused Ishtar's proposal only because he recognized it to be an attempt to transform him into a lord of the netherworld. He also recognized therein a form of death that was repugnant to him. For Ishtar wished not only to kill him but also to turn him into an animal; she wished to change him from a live, civilized man into a dead, wild animal. The prospect of death is all the more frightening when it is seen to involve not only the loss of life but also the loss of human form. Death, then, is the complete antithesis to human life, for everything that is familiar—our identity, our physical and social forms, our relations, and so forth—is lost. Death is absolutely alien. Perhaps death is less dread and its acceptance easier when it is thought to share some similarity with the life we know in this world, when for Gilgamesh the king it is not the total destruction or reversal of the civilized community.

Underlying the interaction between Gilgamesh and Ishtar, then, are the issue of mortality and the question of the form and nature of death. In tablet 6, life and death still stand in stark contrast to each other and have not yet joined to form a continuum. The sense of life and death as balanced but conflicting opposites finds expression in a structured thematic design that draws together Ishtar's proposal and Gilgamesh's account of the lovers, again demonstrating the close connection between the two and confirming our reading of the proposal and our construction of the account as an apposite and reasoned response.

The design centers on the themes of fruit and animals, and these elements are set out in an inverted order. The end of Gilgamesh's speech recalls the beginning of Ishtar's speech. Ishtar's proposal begins with the request for Gilgamesh's fruit (*inbu* [line 8]) and then progresses toward and ends with the offer of animals (lines 18–21). In the ensuing account of lovers, Gilgamesh first mentions the animals and then draws away from them and links up with Ishullanu the gardener; his recital progresses from animals (lines 48–63) to fruit (lines 64–66). The layout follows a chiasmic arrangement, with Gilgamesh's recital reversing and offsetting Ishtar's offer:

- A) Fruit
- B) Animals
- B') Animals
- A') Fruit

In our text fruit and animals function as opposites, with fruit connoting the cultivation of crops, human society, and order, and animals connoting wild nature, the netherworld, and destruction. Were Gilgamesh to have accepted Ishtar's offer, he would have granted her his fruit, entered the netherworld, received the fertility of animals, and become the source of animal life. Thus he would have been transformed into an animal or an animal spirit and taken on an identity similar to that of the animal lovers who accepted Ishtar's advances. But Gilgamesh refuses to offer up his fruit and to assume an animal identity. Hence he first mentions the animals but then dissociates himself from them and draws abreast of Ishullanu, he of the date orchard. Ishullanu thought that he could bestow his fruit on Ishtar without becoming her lover and suffering transformation into an animal. But Ishullanu miscalculated and was turned into an animal, and Gilgamesh must now move even beyond him. He must not only not accept Ishtar's love but also not give her his fruit, for only thus can he save himself from being transformed into an animal. Gilgamesh has shifted the arena from the animal back to the human cultivator; in this way he has thus far successfully opposed Ishtar and her wish to possess him.

Gilgamesh believes that only by holding tight to this course will he succeed in frustrating Ishtar's design and saving himself. But if he will not die and become an animal, she will forcibly impose death and animals. She now reverses the direction of the movement that Gilgamesh had instituted and turns back to the animals. But this reversal in movement is headed not toward animal fertility but, rather, toward the destruction of both animals and nature as a whole. Her move signals the opening of a new chiasm that inverts the prior one.

The direction of the prior chiasm is reversed. But also the design is altered and expanded. Ishtar does more than just counter Gilgamesh by simply moving in a direction opposite to that of his last move; that is, she does more than just reintroduce animals (as she previously had done by transforming the shepherd into a wolf and the gardener into a *dallalu*). Her move shifts the conflict to another plane, with higher stakes. She moves beyond Gilgamesh and thus expands the conflict. Ishtar now treats Gilgamesh as an animal that is to die at the hands of another and larger animal. The regression and expansion are achieved

by Ishtar's introduction of the Bull of Heaven—an animal⁶⁹—as Gilgamesh's counterpart and substitute. We are shocked but not surprised to discover that Ishtar ends up turning even this divine creature into a dead animal.

The composer extends the chiasitic design and the thematic treatment of fruit and animals and creates a new and larger structure. The themes of fruit and animals are translated to a broader—almost cosmic—sphere of activity. Properly speaking, the Bull may represent either fertility or sterility—at one time he spent, I suspect, half the year in this world and the other half in the netherworld; here, in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, he is the exemplar of destruction. With the appearance of the Bull, the story of Ishtar's proposal and Gilgamesh's rejection is expanded and made part of a larger conflict between death, disorder, and sterility represented by the Bull, and life, order, and fertility represented by the gardener-king Gilgamesh. Even if Ishtar's use and misuse of the Bull is a continuation of the scheme presented by Gilgamesh whereby Ishtar's lovers are either animals or are turned into animals, everything now takes place on a larger scale and in a broader arena. The protagonists now loom larger than life. The Bull is the reverse of life and the powerful extension of death; Gilgamesh is the opponent of death and the powerful assertion of life. The two stand in conflict, each invading the territory of the other in ways that are unacceptable if not impossible in an ordered nature.

The game is no longer played by the same rules as before. Once Gilgamesh threatens to destroy the natural order by refusing to die and take on an animal identity, Ishtar herself moves outside the normal pattern and makes use of an animal⁷⁰ in an attempt to destroy Gilgamesh and the civilized, human identity he is trying to retain. But now the natural order is no longer in the ascendancy; actions and their outcome will depend less on custom and brute force, on the predictable sequence of natural events, and more on the strength of personality of the protagonists. And Ishtar discovers that far from destroying

⁶⁹ Given that the main opponent of Gilgamesh and Enkidu in tablet 6 is an animal, it is worth noting that their earlier opponent, Huwawa, seems to be a tree spirit. Elsewhere I hope to amplify my remarks about the Bull of Heaven. Here I should mention that I very much regret that I am unable to shed new light on the animal identity of Ishullanu.

⁷⁰ Her use of the Bull deviates from the standard pattern. One can gain some appreciation of the difference simply by noting the different roles accorded the Bull here and the dogs in the account of the shepherd; the shepherd was turned into a wolf by Ishtar and the dogs simply reinforce that identity. Moreover, there the dogs represent the civilized community, while here the Bull threatens to destroy it. Obviously the composer is not unaware that the several stories share but expand and alter the role of animals.

Gilgamesh, she enhances his social status and reputation and contributes to the destruction of the Bull. The Bull represents the old order; and now it is the power of personal will, exemplified by Gilgamesh's refusal and even by Ishtar's subsequent coercion of Anu, that is decisive.

Gilgamesh's refusal and Ishtar's response result in and represent the destruction of the old order. At one time, for at least part of the year, Gilgamesh was the husband of Ishtar and the Bull was the husband of Ereshkigal. Ishtar's proposal to Gilgamesh is a reflex of an earlier *hieros gamos*; the mourning over the slain Bull (tablet 6, lines 165–67) is a reflex of an earlier seasonal funeral rite. In tablet 6 the marriage of Ishtar and Gilgamesh is rejected,⁷¹ and the Bull is killed with finality, never again to descend and rise with the seasons. Seasonal cycles give way to the assertions of will and decisions of divine and human individuals; in turn these must be integrated into a cosmic order defined and characterized by more complex human organizations. This world and the next will now be organized and ruled in accordance with the forms of civic and imperial order.⁷²

Gilgamesh will accept death when the netherworld is made over into an organized city, when death has assumed a familiar and even comforting guise. It is true that the fear of dying is only a little less sharp when the best life and the best death are depicted as organized cities. But death, then, is not wholly alien, for civilization—paradoxically and ambivalently—is then a corridor to death, and the state of death is seen as both the attainment and the attenuation of civilized existence. Death has been civilized. We witness the transformation of

⁷¹ I do not wish to be misunderstood as saying that tablet 6 is a parody of the sacred marriage; contrast J. van Dijk, "La fête du nouvel an dans une texte de Šulgi," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 11 (1954): 88 and n. 46. Also see nn. 35 and 68 above. Nor is my interpretation to be compared with Böhl's position; for Böhl—in the words of Diakonoff (n. 5 above), p. 65—"The subject of the Akkadian epic is a conflict between the highly ethical religion of Šamaš and the immoral religion of Ištar. . . . The heroes reach the highest point of their ethical elevation when Gilgameš refuses the love of Ištar." See simply Diakonoff's sensible critique (*ibid.*) of this position.

⁷² Whatever else they represent, Gilgamesh's rebuff of Ishtar and the literary movement from nature to city in the order of the lovers also seem to represent a distancing (I hesitate to say divorce or alienation) from nature and a view of humanity as separate from nature. One detects a rejection of that self-definition that views the Human/King as being a part of nature and as doing no more than playing a role in the natural order. In its stead, there is a strong sense of human self-consciousness, a sense of self as a being distinct from nature. If we are dealing with the consequences of actual social change, it would be tempting to relate this stance to the growing rift between the urban center and its natural hinterland and to the emergence of a clear sense of separation. For the arbiters of Mesopotamian literary culture in the second and first millennia (and perhaps for the urban populace as a whole), this process of physical and psychological distancing seems to have found expression in a concomitant decrease in importance of natural deities in general, and the mother-goddess in particular.

the netherworld from a wilderness wherein the goddess dwells with male animals to an orderly society wherein men retain their human forms. Here Gilgamesh will function as a divine official of an infernal extension or replica of a civilized political organization. For Gilgamesh will accept death when he can carry over his civilized identity into the netherworld and need not enter it in the form of an animal,⁷³ when he is able to translate Ishtar's offer into an opportunity to transmute the kingship of Uruk into the kingship of the netherworld.

V

Gilgamesh must eventually die. But in tablet 6, he is not yet ready to accept a new identity and assume a role in the netherworld. He has not yet accepted the limits on his person or realized that the loss of his mortal life is inevitable. Thus far, we have investigated some of the forms of expression and symbolism associated with Gilgamesh's refusal and even touched on the social and cultural dimensions thereof. In this section, we wish to look at Gilgamesh's dilemma from the perspective of living and dying and to use the refusal as a point of departure for the further clarification of some of the psychological struggles and metaphysical implications of the essential Gilgamesh, the man and the god.

Although Gilgamesh rejects Ishtar's offer, he already senses that he will eventually have to come to terms with death. For we are told that Gilgamesh knows things that Ishullanu did not know: by amplifying Ishullanu's laconic remarks in great detail in the first two parts of his speech and, most of all, by then presenting an account of Ishtar's lovers in the third part of the speech, Gilgamesh indicates that he—in contrast to Ishullanu—understands that his own encounter with Ishtar is not an isolated event but part of the unfolding of the established order of things. What is at stake is more than just the loss of a mother's care for the sake of a sexual relationship; rather, it is the surrender of his human life in order to take up his permanent place in a divinely determined cosmic order. Ultimately, Gilgamesh will come to accept the existence and interconnection of the realms of the living and of the dead and will learn that, while immortality and human life cannot go together for him, he is partially divine and can hold onto eternal life by accepting death and becoming a god of the netherworld; his place as an immortal is among the dead and not among living humans or gods of the above.

In tablet 6, then, the seeds of change have already been sown. To appreciate the dimensions of the transformation that is set in motion in

⁷³ Compare the changing forms of Ereshkigal's husbands. The theriomorphic Gugal-anna ("the Bull of Heaven") is replaced by the anthropomorphic Nergal.

tablet 6, we must look beyond this tablet. But to properly understand the relation of the events of tablet 6 to those of the following tablets, we must first consider the place of tablet 6 in the epic, for not only does tablet 6 occupy an important place in the epic, but it also affects and changes the meaning of the work. The impress of this episode on the epic and the transformation it effects in the overall meaning are more readily perceived when it is noticed that the events recounted in tablet 6—Ishtar's proposal, Gilgamesh's refusal, and the killing of the Bull—probably did not belong to the earliest Akkadian version of the epic.⁷⁴ The secondary nature of the episode is suggested, first of all, by the fact that the episode as a whole is functionally equivalent to the battle with *Ḫuwawa* insofar as both describe a battle with and a victory over a supernatural and divinely mandated power and supply a rationale for the death of Enkidu. One of these two incidents is superfluous. Obviously we must give precedence to the expedition to the cedar forest, for it and not the Akkadian precursor of tablet 6 is a documented part of the Old Babylonian version; moreover Enkidu's part in the killing of *Ḫuwawa* provides the more plausible reason for the divine decision to cut short his life.⁷⁵ The extraneous character of our episode is intimated furthermore by the dissonance of its tonal quality; for example, whereas elsewhere in the epic all significant female characters are depicted sympathetically and positively,⁷⁶ Ishtar's image, qualities, and behavior in tablet 6 are destructive and negative. Especially in view of our judgment that tablet 6 is a later addition to the epic, it is no wonder that our novel interpretation of the Ishtar-Gilgamesh interchange leads us to a somewhat different understanding of the relation of tablet 6 to the rest of the epic and of the meaning of the latest version thereof.

The original epic treats the perennial problem of death. When death is only vaguely sensed, Gilgamesh turns reality on its head and deceives himself: he imagines that he will die heroically, thereby assuring his own immortality, and his friend Enkidu will live and serve as a vehicle to transmit his fame (Old Babylonian Yale tablet [cf. Speiser, *ANET*,

⁷⁴ Of course, many scholars are of the opinion that this episode is part of the Old Babylonian epic; so, e.g., Jacobsen (n. 2 above), pp. 213–14. At least some of the text of tablet 6 seems to have been part of the Akkadian epic by the time of the writing of E. Weidner, *Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1922), no. 12, and this latter tablet provides the *terminus ante quem* of the inclusion of our episode.

⁷⁵ See also Tigay (n. 35 above), pp. 48–49 and n. 36.

⁷⁶ I have in mind Shamhat, Ninsun, the Scorpion woman, Siduri, and Utnapishtim's wife. All are solicitous mother figures, but a mother need not be beneficent; note the goddess of death in tablet 12, lines 28–31, 46–53, 58–61 || 65–68 || 72–75 (cf. tablet 7, col. 4, lines 50 ff.).

pp. 78–81] col. 4, lines 5 ff.). But reality requires that Enkidu die and that Gilgamesh remain alive—alone and afraid. Through the death of Enkidu, loss is experienced and death becomes actual. Gilgamesh, bereft, depressed, and fearful, seeks a way to remain alive forever. First he roams like a wild man, and then his journey takes on direction. Finally he resigns himself to death and regains a sense of the meaning of life.⁷⁷ From being a hero who thought he could escape death, he resumes the identity of a king, yet becomes Everyman: he accepts the inevitability of death and the satisfactions of a limited life; he learns to take pride in realistic if monumental creations, man-made structures whose extent may be limited by divine and natural spheres that surround and intersect the area of the city, but which manage, all the same, to draw together the human and the divine, the civilized and the natural (tablet 11, lines 303–7; tablet 1, col. 1, lines 9–21).

This form of the epic (without tablets 6 and 12) presents an account of the man Gilgamesh. Put somewhat differently, we may say that it is the story of a powerful human being and his struggles with and acceptance of the inevitability of death.⁷⁸ For Gilgamesh the hero cannot accept his limited existence; he tests and tries to overcome his human form by recourse first to the heroic mode and then to the fantastic-psychotic mode. Initially he substitutes fame for life in the hope that fame is larger and more enduring than life. Future glory, however, is not as powerful as present experience. With the death of Enkidu, he becomes a human again, but Enkidu's death also renders his human life intolerable. He strips himself of his human form and tries to take on the appearance of a god. In both attempts, Gilgamesh substitutes absolutes for the compromises and limits of human life; rather than accepting mortal-human reality, he seeks first the fantasy of the future and then that of immortality-divinity. The quest is

⁷⁷ On Gilgamesh's approach to death, cf., e.g., Jacobsen (n. 2 above), pp. 202–4, 217; G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* (Berkeley, 1970), pp. 144–45. As regards Gilgamesh's reaction to Enkidu's death, his identification with his dead friend, and his flight from reality, compare the opening pages of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia." When confronted with his own impending death, Enkidu reacts in much the manner that we would expect of him. I have found it useful to compare his reaction to the stages of reaction to death noted by E. Kübler-Ross in her various publications (see, e.g., the chart prepared by M. Imara in the work of E. Kübler-Ross, ed., *Death: The Final Stage of Growth* [Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1975], p. 161). His reaction is not out of proportion and is readily understandable. Certainly, by comparison with Gilgamesh, he rapidly regains his equilibrium and accepts his death. In part, the difference between Enkidu and Gilgamesh is due to differences in range of emotion and relationship to reality: Enkidu's range is much narrower, and he is essentially a pragmatist; Gilgamesh's reaction to the inevitability of death is prodigious.

⁷⁸ Some of my formulations in this paragraph have not been uninfluenced by Whitman's statements regarding Achilles (Whitman [n. 46 above], pp. 181–220).

possible because he is a hero and is part god. Even so, he fails, for there are limits to both his heroic nature and his divine nature, and he must surrender the absolutes of omnipotence and immortality. He accepts a limited existence as the king, builder, and custodian of his city and resigns himself to death.

The original epic deals with the human condition. Gilgamesh the man has learned to die; but this is not enough, for he is also a god and he must learn to die as a god: Gilgamesh the human must die and Gilgamesh the god must become a lord of the netherworld. With the addition of tablet 6, the epic is transformed: from being a work that treats the problem of mortal aging and death—a fate that entered the world after the flood—of a giant and thereby of Everyman, it becomes a work that additionally seeks to define the place of the god Gilgamesh in the cosmic order. In its new form, it prepares the god for his death and sets out his divine role in the netherworld.

Ishtar invites Gilgamesh to become her husband and to take his honored place in the netherworld. Gilgamesh refuses. Far from being a compensation for the loss of eternal life,⁷⁹ the offer of a position in the netherworld heightens the sense of loss and imbues the work more than ever before with a tragic vision. Truly, now Gilgamesh is a tragic figure: he possesses both the nature and powers of a god and might expect to remain in the land of the living; yet now he must also come to terms with the fact that, though he is a god, he cannot enjoy immortality among the gods of the living. He is an immortal, but he is both a man and a god and as such he is destined to die and assume his ordained place in the netherworld. His is the immortality of a god of the netherworld.

Gilgamesh's rejection of Ishtar constitutes an attempt to hold onto his humanity, for by refusing to marry her he tells us that he does not wish to substitute the role of a dead god for that of a live human being; he thinks that he can hold onto life and, at the very least, postpone his death and perhaps even push it off long enough so as to render it no longer inevitable. But his refusal—in this recension—has as one of its consequences the death of Enkidu, for now the gods decide to kill Enkidu "because the Bull of Heaven they have slain and *Huwawa* they have slain."⁸⁰ Gilgamesh's attempt to remain a man causes the death of Enkidu, which loss then forces Gilgamesh (tablets 8 ff.) to shed his humanity and to try to take on the form of an undying god. But just as

⁷⁹ Contrast Lambert (n. 13 above), p. 51; and Tigay (n. 35 above), p. 35.

⁸⁰ The mention of the slaying of the Bull before the killing of *Huwawa* may be due to the fact that tablet 6 is an interpolation. Possibly the order also suggests that the redactor considered the slaying of the Bull to carry an equal if not greater weight of responsibility for the gods' decision to kill Enkidu.

this form of delusion and apotheosis could not work for Gilgamesh the man, it cannot work for Gilgamesh the god. He returns to his human state and thence accepts the particular divine identity/destiny ordained for him. Gilgamesh the man must die, and Gilgamesh the deity must become a god of the netherworld.

Gilgamesh's fate is to die. He resists his fate in both versions and on both levels of his being: the man Gilgamesh of the earlier version thinks he can become a god and thereby escape death. The god Gilgamesh of the later version thinks he can remain a human and thereby escape death. The conflict has its roots in the notion that Gilgamesh is part god and part man. In the earlier version Gilgamesh cannot accept his humanity and thinks he can be a god—he learns that he cannot be a god and must die as a human being. In the later version, Gilgamesh cannot accept his divinity and thinks he can be a human; he must learn that he is neither a normal human being nor a god whose immortality can be enjoyed among the living. Rather, he is a god who must prepare for death and for his role in the netherworld.

But now the reader of the epic is left to wonder: if in any case Gilgamesh will eventually die, why in tablet 6 is he not allowed to accept Ishtar's offer and proceed to the netherworld, instead of being subjected to both the toil and suffering described in tablets 7–11 and the detailed information about the netherworld in tablet 12? Furthermore, the reader asks, when Gilgamesh does eventually die, will he have forfeited his special place in the netherworld by his initial refusal of Ishtar's proposal, or will some form of the original offer remain in effect?

Obviously Gilgamesh must refuse Ishtar if tablet 6 is to be integrated into the epic and not impede the movement of the work. But this is not a sufficient explanation, for ancient redactors have been known to interpolate episodes that are literary blind alleys. Gilgamesh's refusal does more than just advance the action; as indicated earlier, Gilgamesh must redefine Ishtar's offer so that death takes on more familiar human and social forms. But the refusal serves yet another important purpose. We now recall that Ishtar's proposal to Gilgamesh was an invitation to Gilgamesh to abandon, to renounce, a familiar role and to assume a new role that carried with it new rights and obligations as well as a new relationship to the world and the community.

In order that the passage from one state to the other be successful and that Gilgamesh understand the new norms according to which he will have to live, *there must be both a change of being as well as the acquisition of new knowledge.*⁸¹ Prior to the events precipitated by the

⁸¹ For this aspect of rites of passage, cf. Turner (n. 41 above), pp. 93–111; and A. F. C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View* (New York, 1966), pp. 127–30.

death of Enkidu, Gilgamesh was neither prepared nor qualified to undertake his new office in the netherworld, the office of instructor and counsellor of the dead and arbitrator and administrator of the netherworld.⁸² He was not yet ready to make a wholehearted commitment to his new role. Death would have left him feeling constrained and distraught, and he would have sought ways to leave the netherworld; certainly if his own initiation were not complete he would not be able to initiate and guide the newly dead. First, Gilgamesh must undergo the series of experiences recounted in tablets 7–11 in order to be able to accept his own death; only then can he help the dying accept their own deaths. Only after he has been transformed, has undergone a change of being, will Gilgamesh be prepared to accept the offer of a role in the netherworld.

Thus far we have witnessed a change of being in Gilgamesh, but we recall that a rite of passage possesses “in addition to the separation-transition-incorporation form . . . another formal property: a combination of instruction and executive command. The rite of passage includes both some statement, or reminder, of how to play the expected role, and then a directive to commence its performance.”⁸³ This brings us to tablet 12.

Gilgamesh's acceptance of a limited human life is suggested by his experiences in tablet 11 and is expressed clearly in his statement of pride in the construction and compass of Uruk (tablet 11, lines 302 ff.). Of course the acceptance of death is implied in tablet 11. But the more overt acceptance of death and of the role of administrator of the netherworld finds expression only in tablet 12. It is well known that tablet 12 is a late addition to the epic, and that the manner of its addition is mechanical. Here we must emphasize, therefore, that tablet 12 was not added simply because the epic dealt with death and a late editor wished to append and preserve one more Gilgamesh text regarding death. The addition is purposeful and speaks to the heart of the late recension; as such, an organic connection exists between tablets 1–11 and 12.⁸⁴ The addition of tablet 12, while probably not

⁸² For Gilgamesh in this role, cf., e.g., Kramer, “The Death of Ur-Nammu . . .” (n. 23 above), pp. 114–15, lines 94, 142–43; and M. E. Cohen, “Another Utu Hymn,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 67 (1977): 14, line 77. Also see n. 13 above.

⁸³ Wallace, p. 130.

⁸⁴ For a similar opinion, see Tigay (n. 35 above), pp. 106–7; and Levy (n. 47 above), pp. 141–42. After completing this paper, I was pleased to notice that A. Draffkorn Kilmer, “A Note on an Overlooked Word-Play in the Akkadian Gilgamesh,” in *Zikir Šumim: Assyriological Studies Presented to F. R. Kraus on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. G. van Driel et al. (Leiden, 1982), pp. 130–31, has also come to the conclusion that tablet 12 is not simply a mechanical addition, but serves a special function.

coterminous with the insertion of tablet 6, is bound up with and is a consequence of the new configuration created by the inclusion of tablet 6.⁸⁵

Tablet 12 presents a vision of the netherworld and of the shades of the dead. Instruction is one of the main functions of this vision. To be sure, it is true that a vision of the netherworld already appeared in tablet 7, but the two are different and do not serve quite the same purposes.⁸⁶ In tablet 7, column 4, Enkidu's vision of the netherworld provides a clear indication (as do so many of Enkidu's dreams) of what is happening: for Enkidu and Gilgamesh, it announces the death of

⁸⁵ Tablet 12 (for this designation, see the two colophons in Thompson [n. 2 above], pl. 58) contains an Akkadian translation of the latter part of *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld* (hereafter *GEN*) (see A. Shaffer, *Sumerian Sources of Tablet XII of the Epic of Gilgamesh* [Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1963]). This tablet begins in the middle of Gilgamesh's plaint over the loss of his *pukku* and *mekku*. Beginning tablet 12 in the middle of this speech creates an impression of clumsy and insensitive redaction, an impression that may have to be modified somewhat in light of A. Draffkorn Kilmer's suggestion (p. 130) that "the redactor of the canonical version has pulled together the preceding eleven tablets by adding the *pukku/mekku* story, Tab. XII, as a kind of inclusio." Especially in view of the way tablet 12 begins, I find W. G. Lambert's suggestion (personal communication, 1984) that our tablet 12 might represent the second tablet of a two-tablet version of *GEN* not unattractive. However, this suggestion does not warrant the conclusion that the editor who added this second tablet did not possess the first tablet and simply wished to preserve the stray second tablet. I would argue, to the contrary, that the redactor chose to ignore the first tablet and to incorporate only the material of the second tablet. In view of the fact that tablet 12 parallels parts of tablet 7, it is surely not a coincidence that tablet 12 derives from an account (*GEN*) that contains a preceding section that parallels parts of our tablet 6. Both *GEN* and GE tablets 6–7 have accounts of an interaction between Gilgamesh and Ishtar followed by Enkidu's rash behavior, his vision of the netherworld, and his death. But whereas animosity and conflict characterize the relationship between Gilgamesh and Ishtar in tablet 6, the relationship of Gilgamesh and the goddess in *GEN* is supportive and sympathetic. GE tablet 6 and the Inanna-Gilgamesh episode of *GEN* are mutually exclusive, and the redactor of the twelve-tablet version suppressed the beginning of *GEN* perhaps because it was superfluous, but mainly because it contained a positive rather than a negative account of the relationship of Gilgamesh and Ishtar. By adding tablet 12, the redactor has superimposed the new configuration: tablets 6 + 12 (which now supersedes tablets 6 + 7). In any case, the fact that the description in tablet 12 of Enkidu's descent to the netherworld and subsequent report to Gilgamesh is drawn verbatim from a composition in which these events follow upon an interaction between Gilgamesh and Ishtar tends to support my impression that the redactor intended the reader to associate the events of tablets 12 and 6 (and surely, then, Enkidu's instruction of Gilgamesh about the netherworld in tablet 12 supports our interpretation of tablet 6 as a proposal that Gilgamesh enter the netherworld).

⁸⁶ Here I would note that such visions serve various purposes. For one, they help the living to accept the death of those whom they love. They allow the mourner to recall the departed and to realize that the relationship with those who have died is not sundered so long as the survivor can conjure up images of the departed and the feelings associated therewith; at the same time, the vision informs the living that those who have died belong to an absolutely different realm and must be given up. For another, visualizing a concrete destination may help those in the process of dying to accept their end.

Enkidu. It also contains a further message for Gilgamesh. The vision in tablet 7 focuses on the presence in the netherworld of princes and priests. At this point in the work Gilgamesh has attained the heights of heroism, kingship, and public acclaim and defines his identity in social terms. The vision informs Gilgamesh that even those who exercise power and privilege must die. This is a message of supreme importance for Gilgamesh the man; it contains nothing for Gilgamesh the god. In tablet 12, on the other hand, Enkidu's report of what he saw in the netherworld centers on the fate of ordinary men. And this difference is accentuated by the fact that tablet 12 occurs in a work that now includes and revolves around tablet 6 and the account of Gilgamesh's struggle to accept the cosmic role of lord of the dead. Tablet 12 has much to say to and about Gilgamesh the god; for the sake of these messages tablet 12 was added to the epic.

Tablet 12 gives the signal that Gilgamesh has accepted the inevitability of even his own death, for he insists on knowing the order of the netherworld (tablet 12, lines 86 ff.), and Enkidu tells of the death and afterlife of all who have lived. Moreover, by providing a description of the rules that obtain in the netherworld, the text indicates that Gilgamesh is readying himself to assume the divine infernal roles and responsibilities that had been offered him in tablet 6 and that, in spite of his earlier refusal, he has not lost the opportunity; Ishtar's offer stands, albeit in the new social form that Gilgamesh has imposed upon it: the office is reserved for Gilgamesh, and he may accept it whenever he goes to his own death. The recital confirms Gilgamesh in the role of administrator of the netherworld.

But most important of all is the instructional value of Enkidu's report. The essence of Enkidu's message is not a vision of glory or dread but, rather, a simple description of the norms and procedures that govern life in the netherworld. These are the rules that Gilgamesh will be obliged to administer; only when he has been initiated into and mastered the ways of the netherworld will he be able to initiate the dead in their new stations and guide them in the ways of the netherworld.

Tablet 12 was added, then, to express the notion that all who live must die, to reinforce Gilgamesh's acceptance of death, to proclaim that he will serve as a lord of the netherworld, and to communicate to him the rules of the netherworld. Now we finally have renunciation and assumption. To become lord of the netherworld Gilgamesh must undergo a transformation: a change of being and the acquisition of knowledge. When Ishtar proposed to him in tablet 6, he had not yet grown nor been initiated; he was not ready to pass from the living to

the dead. Gilgamesh underwent the spiritual transformation in tablets 7–11; in tablet 12 he acquired knowledge.

In the earlier epic, it was sufficient for the man Gilgamesh to accept limited human life and the inevitability of human death. In the new recension and construction created by the addition of tablet 6, the god Gilgamesh must undergo a transformation of state and incorporate the knowledge appropriate to his new state in order to become the ruler of the netherworld. Tablet 12 informs us that his transformation and transition are complete.

* * *

There are many ironies in the epic. The final irony—and the message of the work—is implicit in the rules and the objects of the rules that dominate Enkidu's recitation in tablet 12 and form the core of knowledge that Gilgamesh must master. On the whole, the characters who dominate Enkidu's vision are not heroes but ordinary men, and it is their everyday deeds that determine their place in the netherworld. Gilgamesh's discovery that the treatment of men in the netherworld depends on ordinary deeds must surely remind the god Gilgamesh of Gilgamesh the man; it recalls Siduri's advice to Gilgamesh: joy and meaning are to be found in the simple pleasures of life. So Gilgamesh the god learns what Gilgamesh the man already knows: Gilgamesh must reconcile himself to and live with his basic humanity in order to be a man in this world and a god in the next.

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ANCIENT SUMER AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT:

The Process of Reaching Behind, Encompassing and Going Beyond

Mary K. Wakeman

The strokes are broad with which I will attempt to paint a picture placing the present-day women's movement in the context of the evolution of Western culture since the beginnings of cities in ancient Sumer. At the same time, the point of view is narrow, in that I speak as a white, middle-class, Protestant, American woman who is now reevaluating the elite, white, male, Western tradition in which she was educated. For me, as for many others, the women's movement has been a religious movement. It has served as a conversion experience, a turning around, as "the pieces of my life have fallen together in a new way."¹ In liberating us from old roles, the movement caught us up in the profoundly disturbing experience of suddenly becoming personally accountable in a way we had not known before. We were abruptly torn out of mythic being and tossed into historic being: from experiencing ourselves secondhand, through internalized, man-made images of women, we were called to realize ourselves as culture-making, history-making, persons-in-charge. We sought out other women to "hear one another into speech,"² and in the process, to found a world on values that would better meet the challenges of our present human circumstances than the ones tradition had taught us.

Feminist scholars are taking a serious interest in ancient Sumer as the birthplace of cities and of Western civilization. (See map on p. 27.) Some of the impetus for exploring ancient history emerges from a religious need felt by participants in the women's movement for a new myth of origins that will reempower women. Several scholars have explored the evidence for the relation between the worship of goddesses and the political and economic power of women in ancient times.³ The record of ancient Sumer can be read

¹ Judith Plaskow, "The Coming of Lilith: Toward a Feminist Theology," in *Womanspirit Rising*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 200.

² Nelle Morton, "Hearing to Speech" (Sermon delivered at the Claremont School of Theology, April 27, 1977).

³ Elise Boulding, *The Underside of History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1976); Elizabeth Fisher, *Woman's Creation* (New York: Doubleday-Anchor, 1979); Ruby Rohrlich, "State Formation in Sumer and the Subjugation of Women," *Feminist Studies* 6 (1980):76-102; Judith Ochshorn, *The Female Experience and the Nature of the Divine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981).

flatly to show that in prebiblical times women enjoyed a good deal of independence. They bought and sold land, engaged in trade, and managed estates. There was once a time (so this way of telling the story goes), well within recorded history, when women were regarded as fully the equals of men in their capacity to wield economic, political, religious and military power.⁴ On the other hand, as I read it, the evidence can be seen stereoscopically, providing a picture of changing relations among gods and goddesses, among men and women, and between divinities and humans, that makes ancient Sumer a splendid laboratory for studying the evolution of a patriarchal social order.

Other feminist scholars have noted the increasing limitation on women's independent exercise of power, as Sumerian civilization developed.⁵ In my discussion of Sumerian history I will focus on the changing definitions of political power and how those were sanctioned in religious terms. In doing so I will take issue with those who find in the Sumerian goddess Inanna a feminist goddess or role model.⁶ I will argue that the religious ideas associated with this goddess were adapted at each new stage of Sumer's history to support the emergence of patriarchal structures of authority. As I investigate this question I find that Inanna points forward to the acceptance of historical process as real, of human initiative as sacred. She also points backward insofar as she remained important in the ancient Sumerian world of increasingly male gods and human leaders because she conserved the values of a time when power was female and communal, when the processes of life, fertility and death were respected, when the fruitful integration of the powers of heaven and earth was celebrated.

The various assessments of Inanna's significance may reflect differences in ideological orientation within the women's movement. Some of the current interest in ancient Sumer is an expression of the explosion of interest in ancient and other goddesses that is informed by what I call "the myth of patriarchy." The myth of patriarchy is a story of how contemporary social and political problems result from mismanagement by men, who deliberately and violently wrested control of human affairs from the women in whose hands those affairs were more competently managed.⁷ The story has a very important function in justifying female anger and encouraging female initiative. It is useful for exorcizing the negative self-images that have been left by "the myth of matriarchy." The myth of matriarchy is a story of how women once ruled but then lost their authority, either through their own fault (e.g., Eve in the Bible), or, again, because it was wrested from them by men. Historically, the world religions (Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu, Jewish, Chris-

⁴ Ochshorn, *The Female Experience*.

⁵ Boulding, *The Underside of History*; Rohrlach, "State formation in Sumer."

⁶ Sylvia Perera, *Descent to the Goddess: A Way of Initiation for Women* (Toronto, Canada: Inner City Books, 1981); Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).

⁷ Elizabeth Gould Davis, *The First Sex* (New York: Putnam, 1971); Merlin Stone, *When God was a Woman* (New York: Dial Press, 1976).

tian) developed at a time when male dominance in political and social life had been firmly established. These religions served as charters authorizing the patriarchal order, justifying it by one form or another of the myth of matriarchy. At the same time they preserved visions of the value of persons, the "person" was assumed to be male. Women were represented as men experienced them, associated with sex and death, nature and mortality, with forces that men feared, and sought to control. In traditional societies the myth of matriarchy is told to a young boy at puberty, during the rite that initiates him into manhood.⁸ The story helps the boy make sense of his experience when he passes out of a household dominated by women and takes up his role as an adult man among men. His new authority over women is thus legitimated. As women hear the story, it serves to "inculcate in them a sense of moral failure."⁹ Presumably, the myth of patriarchy, if men took it seriously, would have a similarly deleterious effect on their self-esteem.

In my view, men and women have always been and will continue to be interdependent. My impulse to give an account of Sumer as a model of a society in transition may be a response to the religious need for a myth of origins, but the story need not be either the myth of matriarchy or the myth of patriarchy. It is possible to talk about how patriarchy began without blaming either women or men. Part of the fascination Sumer holds is the possibility of an end inherent in a beginning. As we look to Sumer for the origins of private property, slavery, capitalism, militarism, and the patriarchal family, we are also made aware of alternative possibilities. Perhaps we are not so different from the ancient Sumerians in our need to understand the new in terms of the old. In ancient Sumer, as we will see, religious sanctions were provided for each new stage in the development of political power by reaching behind, encompassing, and going beyond the previous stage. The ethic emerging in the women's movement today can be described as the result of our reaching behind the biblical, monotheistic world view to affirm bodily and social processes, natural and cultural diversity. In so doing, we encompass the intervening achievement of male-dominated Western civilization (acknowledging how we have been shaped and misshaped by it) and go beyond to new possibilities—taking charge of ourselves and of this small garden we inhabit and share with other species.

*Changing Definitions of Political Power:
How These Were Sanctioned in Religious Terms*

Among the earliest evidence of religious activity in the ancient Near East are female figurines expressing fertility. They testify to a time when the power of fertility was associated with the female; the role of the male in

⁸ Joan Bamberger, "The Myth of Matriarchy: Why Men Rule in Primitive Society," in *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 263–280.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

procreation was not understood. (It stands to reason that until people began domesticating animals, or at least living with enough agricultural abundance that women could menstruate regularly, the connection between sexual intercourse and birth was not obvious.) These figurines are not necessarily goddesses, but they symbolize awe before female procreative powers, and represent an attempt to relate to and appropriate those powers.

With the discovery of the male role in procreation, the power of fertility was expressed through male divinities as well. Many of the earliest temple communities of ancient Sumer belonged to male gods associated with the power of fertility in underground water (Enki), in the moon (Nanna), in the sun (Utu), in the sky that brought the round of seasons (An), in spring storms that brought the water flooding down from the mountains (Ningirsu). If their gods were male it did not necessarily follow that human authority in the early temple communities was assumed exclusively by males. Temples housed goddesses as well as gods; women as well as men were managers of temple estates.¹⁰ The fact that the prefix "Nin" occurs in masculine as well as feminine god names is suggestive. This prefix, usually translated "Lady," or better, "Queen," is written with signs that connote authority. Perhaps the connotation of authority that had more naturally belonged to the female (as mother) came secondarily to be appropriate for male figures as well.

The development of city culture was supported by a religious cult that superimposed on the prehistoric mother goddesses associated with herding and farming at the village level an increasingly elaborate system of deities. While farmers were concerned with fertility in fields and flocks, the urban managers were concerned, in addition, with sanctioning innovations in management. Anthropomorphic divinities lent themselves to the expression of changing power relations among human groups, as family relations were worked out among gods and goddesses.

Two Paradigms of Change

At the very beginning of Sumer's history (c. 3500 B.C.E.) its two most ancient cities, Eridu and Uruk, provided two types of religious sanctions of political power. These served as paradigms for every subsequent stage in Sumer's development. Uruk's doctrine of a marriage between heaven and earth, reflecting the experience of a pastoral group, supplied the formative element in the development of a systematic pantheon in ancient Sumer.¹¹ All of the gods were descended from Uruk's god An (whose name means "sky") and his wife Ki ("earth"). Uruk's goddess Inanna, the bright star (Venus), sister of Utu, the sun, (both children of Nanna, the moon), is one of the

¹⁰ Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 81.

¹¹ J. J. A. Van Dijk, "Le Motif Cosmique Dans la Pensée Sumérienne," *Acta Orientalia* 28, part 1 (Copenhagen, 1964).

cosmic or astral deities characteristic of herding economies.¹² The only serious alternative to this "cosmic" motif came from Eridu, where the views of a settled agricultural people were reflected in the "chthonic" (earthly) belief that the goddess Nammu was the great (watery) mother of all things, including earth (*ki*) and sky (*an*). Enki, god of fresh ground waters and god of the city of Eridu, was the product (son) of a syncretistic union between Uruk's sky god (An), and Eridu's (chthonic) Nammu.

The Eridu paradigm. The earliest concept of power supporting the complex order of the city-state through its central temple was expressed in the masculine cult of Enki, which celebrated the phallic force of fertility. Sumerian myths of origins in which Enki played a prominent role preserve the historical memory of Eridu's preeminence.¹³ They also provide an image of a nonmilitary mode of male power. Before there were storm gods celebrated for their association with the thundering chariots of war, there were male deities who took over the functions of the mother goddesses, expressing the power of fertility in the waters that fell from the sky and welled up from under the earth, to fructify it. In the course of Sumerian history and reflecting the development of patriarchy, Enki (as he is portrayed in myth, e.g., "the creation of man")¹⁴ came to incorporate the other powers of his mother, giving form and giving birth. By about 2000 B.C.E. the name of the mother goddess in the god lists had been completely replaced by that of Enki.¹⁵

The Uruk paradigm. There is a story about how Inanna, goddess of Uruk, traveled to Eridu and tricked Enki into giving her the powers of office.¹⁶ At the same time as it acknowledges the priority of Enki, and his city, Eridu, this story may be a way of accounting for the fact that, very early, Uruk took over from Eridu the role of dominant city in southern Sumer. In Eridu's rival city, Uruk, there was an alternative way of expressing male authority under the power of a female deity. The anthropomorphic con-

¹² Thorkild Jacobsen, "Mesopotamian Gods and Pantheons," in *Toward the Image of Tammuz*, ed. William L. Moran (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 25.

¹³ "Enki and the World Order: The Organization of the Earth and its Cultural Processes," Samuel Noah Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), pp. 59–62.

¹⁴ Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, pp. 68–72; Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 111 ff.

¹⁵ "In the long run, the position of the [mother] goddess in the cosmic hierarchy proved untenable, and slowly she had to yield before a male god who, as she herself, represented numinous power in giving form and giving birth, the god of fresh waters, Enki/Ea. In the latter half of the Isin-Larsa period [the turn of the second millennium] his name begins to precede that of Ninhursaga or other names of the birth goddess in the ranking of the highest gods, An, Enlil, Enki, Ninhursaga etc. and eventually her name was completely replaced by that of Enki." Thorkild Jacobsen, "Notes on Nintur," *Orientalia* 42 (1973), p. 294.

¹⁶ "Inanna and Enki: The Transfer of the Arts of Civilization from Eridu to Uruk," Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, pp. 64–68.

ception of divine forces allowed the idea that the man who managed the temple estate was the husband (or lord, *en*) chosen by its goddess, Inanna.

Sacred Marriage: The Union of Heaven and Earth

As far back as anything is known about Uruk, there is a tradition of Inanna and Uruk's ruler living together in the *gipar* (a quarter of the temple), as husband and wife. From the beginning of Uruk's history we see evidence of a harvest rite of celebration that took the form of a marriage between a god, Dumuzi, the power inherent in seasonal foods (grain, milk, dates) and the goddess Inanna, in whose house, the temple, the foods were to be stored. We may assume that this goddess symbolized the power of the community to provide for itself. The evidence of the Sacred Marriage that we have from this time is a vase, decorated with a design showing a procession of people bearing baskets of dates, grain, or wool, and leading livestock to the door of the temple where the goddess sits to receive them. In the ordinary marriage custom of the Sumerians the groom came bearing gifts of food to the home of the bride. If the family accepted him, and when the bride was ready, she would open the door. That simple gesture concluded the marriage and the next morning, after the marriage was consummated, a great feast would be provided to entertain the wedding guests. Here, the ritual pictured on the vase, the gathering of produce at the temple to store it for later distribution to the people, was apparently experienced as a kind of marriage. The produce was the god (represented by the *en*, the manager of the goddess's estate), entering into or being received by the goddess, the storehouse (represented by a priestess). So the two ways for a man to claim authority in the earliest temple communities were as the trusted servant, or as the husband of the divinity whose estate he managed.

Sumer grew by the northward extension of intensive agricultural use of land, and by the political hegemony of one city over its surrounding territories. As Sumer developed, differences in wealth and resources among the temple communities and between them and the unsettled countryside resulted in more and more frequent raids, calling for a leader in defense. Over the course of a thousand years, kingship developed as an institution, the king being at first a commander in battle, then an adjudicator of boundary and other disputes. As communities grew, they impinged on one another. Quarrels over water rights and access to other resources developed. Eventually magic and ritual duties were added to military and judicial ones, and the king took on some priestly roles. At a certain point, the king himself came to be worshipped for the power of the center that he provided. The king was sacred as a symbol of unity; he served to bring together diverse groups of people, each of which had started out as a temple community, with its own god or goddess symbolizing the power inherent in that community.

It is important to notice here the distinction between the relatively small

and homogeneous temple community that worked largely by consensus, and the sacred power that inhered in the very notion of a central figure who could coordinate the activities of groups of people with interests that might otherwise be pulling against each other. For the power of the spirit in the community was substituted worship of authority at its center.

What began as a temporary conferring of authority on one man who then had the power to command an army to preserve the community against attack, became a sacred institution, as such emergencies became a chronic condition. The origins of male dominated hierarchy, or patriarchy, are reflected in the changed significance of the Sacred Marriage ceremony at the beginning and the end of Sumer's history. In the beginning it was a harvest celebration when produce was brought into the temple to be stored. At the end of Sumer's history, c. 2000 B.C.E., the Sacred Marriage was still performed, but now it was the king of all Sumer who was the god Dumuzi incarnate. The goddess Inanna comes to him not as the spirit of the community, but as a representative of the whole pantheon of gods, who have conferred authority upon the king. Their marriage still recreates and celebrates a harmonious relationship between the human and the divine or natural worlds. The goddess associated with creativity in nature as well as culture and the king responsible for the safety and material welfare of his people express mutual attraction and dependence on one another. But the ceremony also expresses the elevated status of a king who is in effect a god, with the authority to take initiative in manipulating the natural and human environments for greater productivity and security. The palace had, in effect, become the temple, as power-over rather than mutual empowerment was worshipped. There had been a shift three ways: the center of power in the community was the palace rather than the temple, a human being rather than a god, male rather than female. The role of the religious functionaries shifted from serving the people (the manager of the temple estate) to serving the king/warrior elite. Religion validated the structures of power-over rather than empowering the community as a whole, and all this under the aegis of Inanna! How did this come about?

Shifts in Power

During the period of about 3500–2000 B.C.E. one can observe the development of power: of sheer numbers of people brought under one rule, as the effective political center of Sumer moved upriver from city to city (south to north) in consecutive waves of consolidation and disintegration. In what follows, I will refer to three stages of Sumer's historical development. During the Early Dynastic (ED) period, c. 2900–2350 B.C.E. important centers at Nippur in the north, Lagash to the east and Ur in the south experimented with a variety of ways of sanctioning male authority based on the two original paradigms. Next, the Akkadian empire (2300–2150) founded

by Sargon of Agade brought Inanna to international prominence as the tutelary goddess of all Sumer and Akkad. Later, during the Sumerian Renaissance (c. 2100–1800) when the third dynasty of Ur and then the kingdoms of Isin and Larsa dominated all Sumer and brought Sumerian culture to its fullest expression, kings became gods through marriage with the goddess. The process by which power shifted from the temple to the palace, from gods to human beings, from female to male, can be seen in these developments.

In Sumerian tradition,¹⁷ Eridu, the southernmost city of Sumer, was the first of five cities to hold kingship over the land before “the flood.” As noted above, Eridu was superseded in importance by Uruk (upriver and to the west). The “urban revolution,” first evident at Uruk at the end of the fourth millennium, involved not so much an increase, as a redistribution of population, concentrating in urban centers, decimating the countryside.¹⁸ City culture was characterized by greater population density, more intensive use of land, and differential access to wealth. The appearance of writing testifies to the growing complexity of commerce and administration. Kin-based organization yielded to social stratification. An almost complete cultural break, referred to as “the flood,” occurred, as a result of the influx of Semitic-speaking people from the north and northwest.¹⁹ After “the flood,” Sumer extended from Eridu in the south to the Semitic city of Kish in the north.

The Early Dynastic Period: Power Shifts from Temple to Palace

During Early Dynastic times (2900–2350 B.C.E.), the concept of the nation, Sumer, developed. The term “Early Dynastic” refers to the plethora of dynasties in Sumer as reflected in the Sumerian King List. The title “king of Kish” was assumed by various city chiefs who claimed that their authority to rule the whole area of Sumer was given them by the god Enlil, the executor of the will of the assembled gods of Sumer.²⁰ Enlil, whose name (“Lord Wind”) expresses his expansive character, was beloved by farmers, for whom he invented the hoe. His temple in Nippur was the chief shrine of the

¹⁷ Thorkild Jacobsen, “The Sumerian King List,” *Assyriological Studies* 11 (Chicago, 1939), p. 70ff.

¹⁸ Robert M. Adams, “Survey of Ancient Watercourses and Settlement in Central Iraq,” *Sumer* 14 (1958), pp. 101–3; Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 78 n. 53.

¹⁹ Adam Falkenstein, “The Prehistory and Protohistory of Western Asia,” in *The Near East*, ed. Jean Bottero, Elena Cassin, Jean Vercoutter (New York: Delacorte Press, 1967), p. 51.

²⁰ Perhaps the relation of An, as head of the assembly of the gods, and Enlil as its chief executive, can be understood with reference to the political history of Sumer. As power shifted from the temple community as a whole, represented by its god or goddess, to the king as the center of initiative, coordinating the activities of several such communities, An came to represent the consensus reached by the assembly of the gods, and Enlil the power to carry out its will.

land to which pilgrimages were made from cities of the "Kengir League."²¹ City walls appeared, testifying to the increased incidence of war. During ED II the shift in power from temple to palace resulting from increased military activity gave Enlil prestige in Sumer as the god who authorized kings, and lessened the possibility of power for women.²² The Uruk system in which the ruler was chosen by Inanna conflicted with the dynastic principle which took hold in the north.²³

Uruk's power was on the wane during the Early Dynastic period as military activity increased. Not mentioned in the Sumerian King List are the *ensis* ("officials in charge of ploughed lands" or governors) of Lagash, a territory north and east of Uruk. For 150 years before and fifty years after Sargon's empire, Lagash and its royal city Girsu (belonging to the god Ninurta, known locally as Ningirsu), dominated Sumer. Royal inscriptions from Lagash and records from a temple in Girsu inform us about its rulers. Mesalim, "king of Kish," settled a boundary dispute between the cities of Lagash and Umma in the territory of Lagash sometime during ED II. Ur-Nanshe established a dynasty c. 2520 which lasted for five generations. His grandson Eannatum conquered Elam, Umma, Ur and Uruk.

The evidence from Lagash shows that the *ensis* authorize their claims to rule with reference to Ningirsu, to several goddesses who have temples in the area, and to Enki, Inanna and Enlil as gods of Sumer.²⁴ It is possible that Ningirsu, the power in spring storms originally represented by a lion-headed bird, was understood to be incarnate in the *ensi* as he celebrated the Sacred Marriage with Bau, city goddess of Lagash.²⁵ Uru-inim-gina (formerly known as Urukagina)²⁶ reestablished Ningirsu and his consort Bau as the

²¹ Jacobsen, "Early Political Development in Mesopotamia," *Toward the Image of Tammuz*, p. 140ff.

²² Boulding, *The Underside of History*, p. 192.

²³ This conflict is illustrated in the epic tales (from Old Babylonian times) which reflect the culture of the heroic age of Uruk (ED II). In the Sumerian story of Lugalbanda, Inanna "looked at [Lugalbanda] as if he were Dumuzi" (her husband, in myth), thus choosing him over the son of the contemporary ruler, Enmerkar. In the Akkadian epic, Gilgamesh rejects Ishtar, refusing to take her as his wife. Dynastic rule was in fact instituted when Gilgamesh's son, Urnungal, succeeded him (King List). It is true that Enlil chose the "king of Kish," but this was a matter of authorizing the leadership of a particular city (within which the dynastic principle was normal, for instance, I Lagash) over Sumer as a whole.

²⁴ E.g., Mesalim "beloved of Ninhursag;" Eannatum "whose name was called to mind by Enlil; endowed with strength by Ningirsu; envisaged by Nanshe in her heart; truly and rightly suckled by Ninhursaga; named by Inanna;" "Inanna, because she loved him, gave [Eannatum] the kingship of Kish;" or Entemena "endowed with the scepter by Enlil, endowed with intelligence by Enki, envisaged in the heart of Nanshe, great governor of Ningirsu" etc. Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 309ff.

²⁵ Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 297.

²⁶ Joan Oates, *Babylon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979), p. 45.

owners of the temple lands in Lagash that had been confiscated by the previous rulers. His motive may have been to justify usurping power from the Ur-Nanshe dynasty. Given the similarity in the relationship between Bau and Ninurta, Inanna and Dumuzi, it is an interesting question how Inanna managed to remain centrally significant to the representation of power, while Ninurta's importance in the Sumerian pantheon clearly outshone Bau's. Stories and graphic representations show close parallels between Inanna and Ninurta as divinities associated with storm and war. By the end of Sumer's history, Ninurta and Inanna-Ishtar are nearly equivalent as symbols of kingship.

Uru-inim-gina, "renowned for his social and ethical reforms,"²⁷ issued an edict imposing monogamy on women, thus instituting patrilineal inheritance. He brought his wife Shashag's property under his control, reducing her status to that of consort.²⁸ Uru-inim-gina was ousted, in turn, by Lugalzagesi (priest of Nisaba, reed goddess of Umma) who, as ruler of both Ur and Uruk, claimed that Enlil had given all lands to him, from the lower sea (Persian Gulf) to the upper sea (Mediterranean).²⁹

The historical tradition of Ur embodied in the King List does not reach back as far as that of Kish and Uruk. Excavations of the royal tombs at Ur, a southern city belonging to the moon god Nanna, show wide differences in wealth, which testify to the progress of social stratification. The title "king of Kish" is claimed by Mesanepada, founder of the first dynasty of Ur c. 2490. Ur had a harbor on the Persian Gulf and presided over the southern sea trade. "Consequently every major kingdom formed in Babylon tried to gain possession of Ur."³⁰ Ilshu, who came from Mari far up the Euphrates river during or before Eannatum's time to lay claim to Sumer, was sufficiently concerned with the cult of Ur to dedicate his daughter Ninmetabarri as the human consort of Nanna.³¹ We have a record of the names of the women who served as high priestess of Nanna at Ur for over 500 years. "This appointment was a royal prerogative which was exercised through numerous dynastic changes and provided in Sumer a unifying link even in periods of apparent disunity."³² Nanna was the first-born son of Enlil; his wife Ningal ("great lady") was the daughter of Enki's wife Ningikuga ("lady of the pure reed"). Thus from our vantage point we might say that the priestess who represented Ningal at Ur competed with the goddess Inanna at Uruk as the female figure through whom male power was authorized, and complemented Enlil's powers to provide religious sanction for the developing nation.

Three ways of authorizing a king. The "joining of lordship and king-

²⁷ Kramer, *The Sumerians*, p. 58.

²⁸ Rohrlach, "State Formation in Sumer," p. 85.

²⁹ Dietz Otto Edzard, "The Early Dynastic Period," *The Near East*, p. 85.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³¹ Jacobsen, "Early Political Development," *Toward the Image of Tammuz*, p. 152.

³² Oates, *Babylon*, p. 38.

ship,"³³ the authority of the male ruler in relation to the goddess at Uruk, and in relation to the priestess at Ur, brought together the oldest religious traditions of Sumer as exemplified in the worship of the goddess Inanna and the god Enki. Nanna, like Enki, was associated with male powers of fertility. Like Inanna, he was involved in a Sacred Marriage. Through marriage to the priestess at Ur, Nanna (son of Enlil, "prince of the gods")³⁴ came to serve Enlil as his appointed king.

If a man could claim *en*-ship in relation to Inanna, in relation to the *entu* (Nanna's priestess), he was Nanna incarnate. His relation to their two cities is important to his claim to rule all Sumer. As the warrior chosen by Enlil he is king; as spouse of Inanna, he is priest; as the young bridegroom of the priestess of Nanna, he is the god who brings fertility to the earth, though this god, like Ninurta, is only a prince in relation to Enlil. A reversal of the roles of the divinity and the human being similar to the reversal of the roles of Nanna and his wife (as compared with those of Dumuzi and Inanna) apparently took place in Girsu, between Ningirsu and Bau. As I reconstruct how this came about, increasing wealth brought increasing need to defend the community from attack, therefore the *ensi* attempted to protect the community from human as well as natural threats. The justification for his authority came to depend more on his association with the god Ninurta/Ningirsu than with the goddess Bau, as the character of the god which initially expressed fertility shifted to emphasize his warrior aspect. It is interesting that "among farmers in the north, in Nippur, and in the east, in Girsu, Ninurta tends to displace Nanna as the first born son of Enlil."³⁵ Clearly, Lagash's claims to authority in Sumer rivaled those of Ur-Uruk: reason enough for the nonmention of its *ensis* in the King List, which derives from Uruk.

Sacred Marriage as the rite involving a sexual union on which claims of dynastic succession to rulership could be based may well have had its origins in Ur, as an expression of interdependency between the (Ur) temple and the palace (designated by the priesthood at Nippur). Authority continued to be exemplified in the priesthood of Ur as an intercity institution primarily concerned with economic cooperation, while the priesthood at Nippur vested political authority in the "king of Kish" (whatever his native city) who maintained peace among, and protected or extended the boundaries of a league of cities. In ancient Uruk, the ruler served the goddess: the priest served the temple community. At Ur, the goddess served the king: the priestess served the palace on the assumption that the palace served the whole of Sumer. In the transition from local to national significance, the roles of the divinity and the manager of the divinity's estate were reversed.

³³ Jacobsen, "Early Political Development," *Toward the Image of Tammuz*, p. 152.

³⁴ Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

To sum up, the special relationship of Nippur, Ur and Uruk was that they represented the three traditional ways of authorizing a king that had emerged by the end of the Early Dynastic period. To the title "king of Kish" had been added "lord of Uruk" and "king of Ur." Appointment by Enlil carried with it the notion of wind and water that moves past all boundaries. Enlil was essentially expansive: the warrior. As the spouse of Inanna, the king represented the community as it cooperated with seasonal change to produce bounty. Impersonating Nanna, (or Ninurta), he laid claim to fertility (and the principle of dynastic succession) as a male rather than a female capacity.

The Akkadian Empire: Power Shifts from God to Human

Lugalzagesi had laid the foundations for the empire that was to be established by his conqueror, Sargon of Akkad. The Akkadian empire lasted a century and a half (2300–2150) and represented an enormous leap in power. With a new capital north of the city of Kish, the empire stretched from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean. The inclusion of new and diverse populations introduced a qualitative change in the nature of the human community that would constitute a political unit. This change was reflected in new religious ideas.

When Sargon conquered Lugalzagesi, he continued the dynastic union of Ur and Uruk in his own person, making his daughter Enheduanna, priestess to Nanna at Ur and to An (the sky god) at Uruk. By thus instituting a cultic union of their chief priestly offices he broke the tradition of expressing the condominium of Ur and Uruk as the kingship of Ur and the *en*-ship of Uruk, which had been established by Lugal-kigennesh-dudud.³⁶ Moreover, it was Inanna (not Nanna or An) whose power was invoked to support Sargon's Semitic empire.³⁷ By identifying her with the warlike Semitic goddess Ishtar, and exalting her as the female counterpart of An, Enheduanna provided Sargon with a religious justification for his rule that appealed to the northern, Semitic villagers who still associated fertility, and therefore power, with femaleness. At the same time, this union revived the most ancient cosmology of southern Sumerian Uruk which derived all life from the marriage of heaven (An) and earth (Ki, with whom Inanna was identified).³⁸

What were the religious ideas that had developed in association with this goddess that made her such a powerful and effective symbol of Sargon's imperial ambition? Thorkild Jacobsen calls Inanna the goddess of "infinite

³⁶ W. W. Hallo and J. J. A. Van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 9.

³⁷ Inanna is "exalted" as the goddess whose "divine attributes are hers by grace of An, the supreme god, with whom she is thus equated at the expense, not of Enki, but of Nanna." Hallo and Van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna*, p. 50.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

variety.”³⁹ On the Uruk vase Inanna appears with the horned crown of divinity, receiving a basket of dates. She is associated with herding as the goddess of the evening star, one of the astral deities along with her brother Utu (sun), and father Nanna (moon). A text from early Uruk refers to “a festival on the day the Inanna star sets.”⁴⁰ Linked with An, she is also identified with Antum, the power in rain clouds. Her name may be translated “Queen of Heaven.” The fact that she is historically capable of mediating between agricultural and herding economies⁴¹ may have made her an appropriate symbol for expressing the increasing power developing in the human community.

The Venus star with which Inanna is associated expresses the concept of inconstancy. It is visible for about eight months in the western evening sky, disappears for a week or two, reappears in the eastern sky again for about eight months, then disappears for almost three months before reappearing once more in the western sky. The story of Inanna's journey to the underworld is (among other things) about this phenomenon.⁴² In the Sumerian account of her journey, it is she who is the dying-rising divinity. Dumuzi (her husband/the king) substitutes for her in the underworld, expressing the importance of human mortality to the proper functioning of the universe. In the later, Akkadian version of this tale, all sexual activity was suspended in Inanna's absence. Perhaps her image expressed the fruitfulness of change in the face of egoistic fears. The lady is not by accident goddess of both love (life) and war (death). Marriage and battle are the two perennial means of enlarging community. Sex and death are confronted as realities to be dealt with together, as can be shown in innumerable examples from comparative mythology (e.g., Adam and Eve). This theme of confronting death and change arises as a major one in every heroic age, that is, at the dawn of history: of awareness of the significance of (public, male) activity in time. So Inanna's very changeableness, one might say, expresses the dawning of historical (patriarchal) consciousness. As a symbol of change, she expresses an acceptance of historical process as real while her simultaneous appearance in myth and epic as a femme fatale expresses the fears associated with sexuality, change and death.

³⁹ Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 135.

⁴⁰ Falkenstein, “The Prehistory and Protohistory of Western Asia,” *The Near East*, p. 47.

⁴¹ Jacobsen, “Mesopotamian Gods and Pantheons,” *Toward the Image of Tammuz*, p. 27. Both Inanna and Nanna are astral in character, which may be significant for the development of Sumer in terms of the reliance of planters on the herders' knowledge of the movements of the heavenly bodies. Though local emphases on herding, fishing, and orchards vary, the overall economy of Sumer depends on grain agriculture. The authority the herders have by virtue of their knowledge of the movements of the heavenly bodies in relation to the seasons may be reflected in the traditional way of representing divinity as crowned with horns.

⁴² Wolfgang Heimpel, “A Catalog of Near Eastern Deities,” *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 4:3 (Malibu: Undena Publications, n.d.).

Sargon ruled as Inanna-Ishtar's servant, as the *en* had in Uruk, by her choice, but now over all Sumer and Akkad, overriding the claims of the dynasties which had ruled as the elect of Enlil. (Note that it is the king ruling from his palace as servant of the goddess who is in charge of the state, not the priestess of the temples in Ur and Uruk.) Enheduanna's account of her expulsion from her posts at Ur and Uruk and her claim to have been restored by (or even *as*) Inanna may be a way of expressing the change in role from priestess as servant of a male god, to "goddess" as servant of the king. In other words, for all Enheduanna's fame, her elevation of Inanna as support for Sargon's rule represented a further curtailment of the independent power of women, as power shifted from the divine to the human ruler. When Enheduanna sings of Inanna as An's wife,⁴³ this reflects Sargon's policy of regularizing the position of Inanna to conform to the Ur pattern, thus demoting her, in relation to her consort, from divine to human, from the served to the servant.

The Sumerian Renaissance: Power Shifts from Female to Male

The "Dynasty of Ishtar" was brought to an end by the Gutians, people from the mountains to the northeast "who destroyed much and built nothing."⁴⁴ They took hold permanently only in the north, and Sumerian culture again flourished (as now Uruk, then Lagash, then Uruk and Ur together took the lead), especially during the second dynasty of Lagash under Gudea. Gudea came to power in Lagash as the son-in-law of Ur-Bau, presumably by engaging in the rite of Sacred Marriage with Ur-Bau's daughter Enanepada, high-priestess of Nanna at Ur. Utuhengal of Uruk expelled the Gutians, and it was his general (and brother) Ur-Nammu, who founded Ur III and ushered in the period of richest cultural flowering before Sumer was brought to an end by the Amorite (or first) dynasty of Babylonia (Ham-murabi, 1972).

It was during the Ur III and Isin-Larsa periods at the end of Sumer's history (2100–1800) that the rite of Sacred Marriage became the quintessential expression of Sumer's religious and political self-understanding. Shulgi claimed to rule Sumer as the son of Ur-Nammu and the Ur priestess.⁴⁵ We have an account of how Shulgi managed to celebrate the New Year festival, including the marriage with Inanna at Uruk and with the priestess of Nanna at Ur in the same day.⁴⁶ Eventually the Ur III state fell victim to centrifugal force, and to the Elamites, who destroyed Ur. Having expelled the Elamites,

⁴³ Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 137; Hallo and Van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna*, p. 97.

⁴⁴ Jean Bottero, "The First Semitic Empire," *The Near East*, p. 120.

⁴⁵ Jacobsen, *Toward the Image of Tammuz*, p. 387 n. 80.

⁴⁶ Samuel Noah Kramer, *From the Poetry of Sumer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 63.

the kings of Isin claimed the title "king of Ur" and the authority of Enlil for their city's rule over the whole of Sumer. Iddin-Dagan of Isin was exalted as the incarnation, not of Nanna, but of Dumuzi. It is the relationship between Inanna and Dumuzi that is celebrated in the hymns and songs from this time associated with the Sacred Marriage rite performed at the new year. We have come full circle back to the tradition of ancient Uruk, but in a way that marks the triumph of patriarchy in elevating a man to divine status through marriage to a goddess while lowering the status of female priestly authority at Ur, through whom that divine status had initially been conferred.⁴⁷

Iddin-Dagan is applauded as the incarnation of Dumuzi-Amaushumgalanna as he goes "with lifted head" to bed down the goddess, in the Hymn to Inanna as the Evening Star.⁴⁸ Dumuzi was originally the nurturing power in various foods: grain, milk, dates.⁴⁹ In much of the literature about him, his loss (when those foods were out of season) was mourned by his sister and his mother. Examining sources which refer to the marriage relationship, Jacobsen notes "a shift in emphasis: from the god as source of all blessings, the goddess as receiving; to the goddess as the source, the god as recipient." He concludes that more recent, probably, "is the view of the god as recipient, since that would appear to represent a gradual *fading of the divine identity in favor of the human one* of the king in whom he was incarnate in the rite."⁵⁰ Humanity is dependent on the gods, but among humans, the king is a god.

Perhaps the reason why Uruk's idea of Sacred Marriage reemerged in Ur III times was because it provided a statement of the order of nature and society that seemed uniquely right to the Sumerians at that time: divine had rank over human, but male had rank over female, so female divine (Inanna) and male human (the king) expressed in their union a perfect integration or balance. In terms of power, this resolution represented a demotion of the goddess, while providing the prerequisite of any claim to authority among Sumerians that it be rooted in female power.⁵¹

⁴⁷ The name of Sargon's grandson, Naram-Sin, is the first to appear on inscriptions with the determinative of divinity. He is depicted wearing the horns of divinity (though only one pair) on his stele. A recently discovered inscription relates how the citizens of Agade, out of respect for his effectiveness as a warrior, appealed to the deities of Sumer to make him their city-god. (Oral communication from Thorkild Jacobsen, summer 1984.)

⁴⁸ Thorkild Jacobsen, "Religious Drama in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Unity and Diversity*, ed. Hans Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 66; *Treasures of Darkness*, p. 38.

⁴⁹ Jacobsen, "Toward the Image of Tammuz," *Toward the Image of Tammuz*, p. 89.

⁵⁰ Jacobsen, "Religious Drama," *Unity and Diversity*, pp. 68, 71 (Italics mine).

⁵¹ A most ancient and persistent way for a ruler to claim authority in Sumer was to say that he was raised on the milk of Ninhursag, or was born of Ninsun or one of the other mother goddesses (cf. note 24, above); Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 158-9. Note how many king's names include the name of a goddess: Ur-Nanshe, Ur-Bau, Ur-Nammu etc.

This celebration of a king as the choice of the goddess asserts a harmony between social manipulation and what the gods want, in the face of doubts about the whole agricultural and commercial enterprise as unnatural interference. The Inanna of the "Herder Wedding Text"⁵² has completely lost her distinctive character as a rival of Enki when she is identified with the earth, asking "who will plough my vulva?"⁵³ Marriage as a metaphor for the union of equals, as it is used to express the relationship between the community and the gods, the harmonious integration of cultural efforts and natural bounty to produce abundant crops and herds, masked what was essentially a master/slave relationship, authorizing the institution of class domination first, and male dominance in particular. As the king serves the gods by organizing his society for production, so the people serve the king by working the land to the advantage of the managerial class. As the goddess depends on the king coming "with lifted head" to plough her vulva, so the people depend on the tax collectors who come periodically to strip them of their surplus! It is true, up to a point, that production increases with larger-scale management. But "in order to raise armies and supply them with arms and equipment, the rulers found it necessary to infringe on the personal rights of the individual citizen, to tax his wealth and property to the limit, and to appropriate, as well, property belonging to the temple."⁵⁴

The custom requiring that whoever claims to rule them should travel to the various cities of Sumer to celebrate there according to local tradition, apparently reached a breaking point with Shulgi. From then on, the gods

⁵² Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 43ff.

⁵³ Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna*, p. 37. Compare: "An American Indian prophet, Smohalla, chief of the Wanapum tribe, refused to till the ground. He held that it was a sin to mutilate and tear up the earth, mother of all. He said: 'You ask me to plow the ground! Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom? Then when I die she will not take me to her bosom to rest. You ask me to dig for stone! Shall I dig under her skin for her bones? Then when I die, I cannot enter her body to be born again. You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it, and be rich like white men! But how dare I cut off my mother's hair?'" (Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959), p. 138.) with this portion of the "Herder Wedding Text":

The young lady [Inanna] was praising her parts
and the elegist was weaving it into a song . . .
"my hillock land, so (well) watered,
my parts, piled up with levees,
(well) watered
I, being (but) a maiden,
who will be their ploughman? . . .

And the elegist responds:

"Young lady, may the king plough them for you!
May the king, Dumuzi, plough them for you!"

Inanna replies,

"The man of my heart! The ploughman is the man of my heart!"

(Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 45-6.)

⁵⁴ Kramer, *The Sumerians*, p. 80.

(represented by the various temple personnel) came to the king. In the Iddin-Dagan text mentioned above, the marriage is celebrated in a palace (presumably at Isin), and Inanna is referred to as the "lady of the palace." Looking at the role of Sumer's most important female religious functionaries, we may describe a progression from the autonomous power of the priestess of Inanna who chose the *en* (pre-"flood" Uruk), to its lessening as she was appointed by the ruler to be the human spouse of the god Nanna at Ur (by the end of ED III), until eventually (Ur III and later) she became merely the consort of the human god Dumuzi, incarnate in the king. There had been a time when it was as a human that the male wedded the goddess (the *en* of Uruk, ED II and earlier). Sargon still claimed authority as the servant of the goddess. The Uruk idea reached its full expression only in the Ur III period when the king became the divine husband of Inanna.

Reaching Behind, Encompassing, and Going Beyond

We are now in a position to review the changing definitions of political-religious power to demonstrate the process of reaching behind. An of Uruk and Enki of Eridu were the primeval alternatives to the prehistoric mother goddesses (whose authority, associated with village culture, lingered longer in the north). They exemplified two nonmilitary modes of male power. Sumer grew northward by the extension of agriculture, by military conquest and trade, and by the political hegemony of Kish as authorized by the priesthood of Enlil at Nippur. What Sargon did in exalting Inanna-Ishtar was to reach behind the Nippur-Kish-Ur definition of power to an earlier one exemplified in ancient Uruk, and to adapt it by identifying Inanna with Ishtar the Semitic goddess of love and war, and by elevating Inanna's status among the Sumerian gods, so as to support the notion of a larger Sumer-Akkadian state. If Enlil was an extender of boundaries, Inanna, the "lady of myriad offices,"⁵⁵ was a mediator of differences. At the local, temple-community level, Inanna had the advantage over Enki in remaining female, providing continuity with the most ancient religious traditions. Commanding the allegiance of all Sumer, Enlil renewed the tradition of male power, adding military strength to Enki's technical skill. With the addition of Ishtar's warlike aspect and elevation in cosmic status as An's wife, Inanna became a fitting symbol of Sargon's imperial power. Through their ritual marriage to her, the kings who oversaw the richest flowering of Sumerian culture claimed divine status for themselves.

Ancient Sumerian political wisdom culminated in Ur III Sacred Marriage as a more viable alternative to mother goddesses then Eridu's phallic worship. In Uruk's way of understanding power, the lady Inanna is anything but a mother.⁵⁶ Under Sargon, Inanna became the principle divinity of the

⁵⁵ Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 141.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Akkadian empire (leaving Uruk to the father-god, An). She became the means by which the kings of Ur III made their claim to rule Sumer, but as the "lady of the palace," Inanna (the priestess) was essentially the consort of the king, and the goddess became the figure more familiar to us from the Gilgamesh epic, the petulant daughter who had to throw tantrums to get her way with her father, An.

The institution of Sacred Marriage culminated the development of divine authorization of the human community's power to instigate, take initiative and dominate its environment. Fear of interfering with nature (female) had been faced by transferring power to a human (male) king. As the one through whom the king became a god, Inanna sanctified human efforts to take charge of and change the environment (both cultural and natural).

In the course of the next thousand years, the goddess was repudiated altogether, as new ways of legitimating political power were worked out in religious terms. In the second half of the second millennium the king of Babylon was understood to be the chosen servant of the god Marduk. Two classics from that time indicate once again that the new terms were worked out in reaction to those immediately preceding, and through retrieving a value from a previous phase. "Enuma Elish" is an account of how Marduk was granted "sole right of decree" by the assembly of the gods in order to conquer their enemy and create the cosmos from the goddess's parts. As Jacobsen interprets this Babylonian creation story, the rebellious Tiamat ("sea-land") refers to Sumer itself, and all that its culture stands for.⁵⁷ As Enki's son and heir, Marduk represented a reach behind the Uruk tradition to the earlier one of Eridu, but incorporated the military might symbolized by Enlil, Ninurta and Ishtar. In the creation story, Marduk is a triumphant warrior against the original mother, who became the symbol of chaos. The king ruled now as Marduk's protege (and with equally absolute authority). The goddess Inanna became, in myth, an ineffectual troublemaker. As she appeared in the epic that made the exploits of Gilgamesh famous, she failed in her attempt to persuade the hero to marry her.

The next big shift in consciousness, the one reflected in the biblical tradition, came as a result, again, of a qualitative change in the conception of human community. The shift from polytheism to monotheism accompanied the growing intuition, provoked by international relations as they developed in the ancient Near East, that humanity is one. Thus far, the state had been equated with the cosmos, and what lay outside it with chaos. The need arose to recognize the reality of other states and to define international relations in some way. I am referring here to complex processes at work in the ancient Near East throughout the course of the second millennium. One result of these processes can be seen in the form of an international treaty, known from Hittite and Egyptian records, from around the time of Israel's exodus

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 190.

from Egypt. That treaty form helps to clarify the understanding that Israel had of itself at a later time, as a collection of vassal states under one great king, Yahweh.⁵⁸ God, whose fatherhood appears as a vestigial remnant from the days of polytheism, was preferable to the city-state kings of Canaan. Thus the king who became god provided a model for the god who became king over the tribes of Israel, in covenant federation, and over the federation of nations, in Isaiah's later vision. The mortal aspect of the goddess's husband Dumuzi, meaningful when it had been associated with the periodic death and rebirth of vegetation, was taken up and reinterpreted through Isaiah's figure of the suffering servant, which in turn shaped the way Christ was presented in the gospels. The process of reaching behind and encompassing to go beyond is characteristic in the continuing religious work of sanctioning new forms of political power.

The Ethic Emerging in the Women's Movement

In our fascination with prehistoric and ancient cultures the women's movement is reaching behind the intervening patriarchal development to recover our sense of connectedness with the earth, with other species, with each other, and with our own bodies. Meanwhile we have also built on Sumer's foundation. Patriarchal values have shaped us so that we regard ourselves as responsible agents, capable of taking charge of our relationship to the rest of the natural and human world, and capable of taking charge of reproduction as an aspect of our own species life. Our present situation calls for new ways of thinking, feeling and acting in response to conditions that have arisen in, and as a result of, a context of values that is no longer sufficient to deal with its own consequences: the power to destroy ourselves. The exercise of power by one person or group over another, the development of hierarchical forms of order, the emergence of unifying symbols, and the achievement of ego-centered personality all may be seen as relatively successful strategies for dealing with environmental stress. But as a result of these strategies, we have achieved a degree of technological proficiency that requires us to become personally accountable in a new way. What it means to be a person has changed.

In ancient Sumer, who you were was determined by what corporate group you were born into. There was no individual, legally speaking. The idea of voluntary association, the possibility of a community made up of those who had chosen rather than been born into it (and were morally culpable therefore), was the significant discovery (under historical pressure) of biblical faith. Still, the choice was made by men. What it means to be a person is changing now to a sense of self (whether male or female) that embodies a

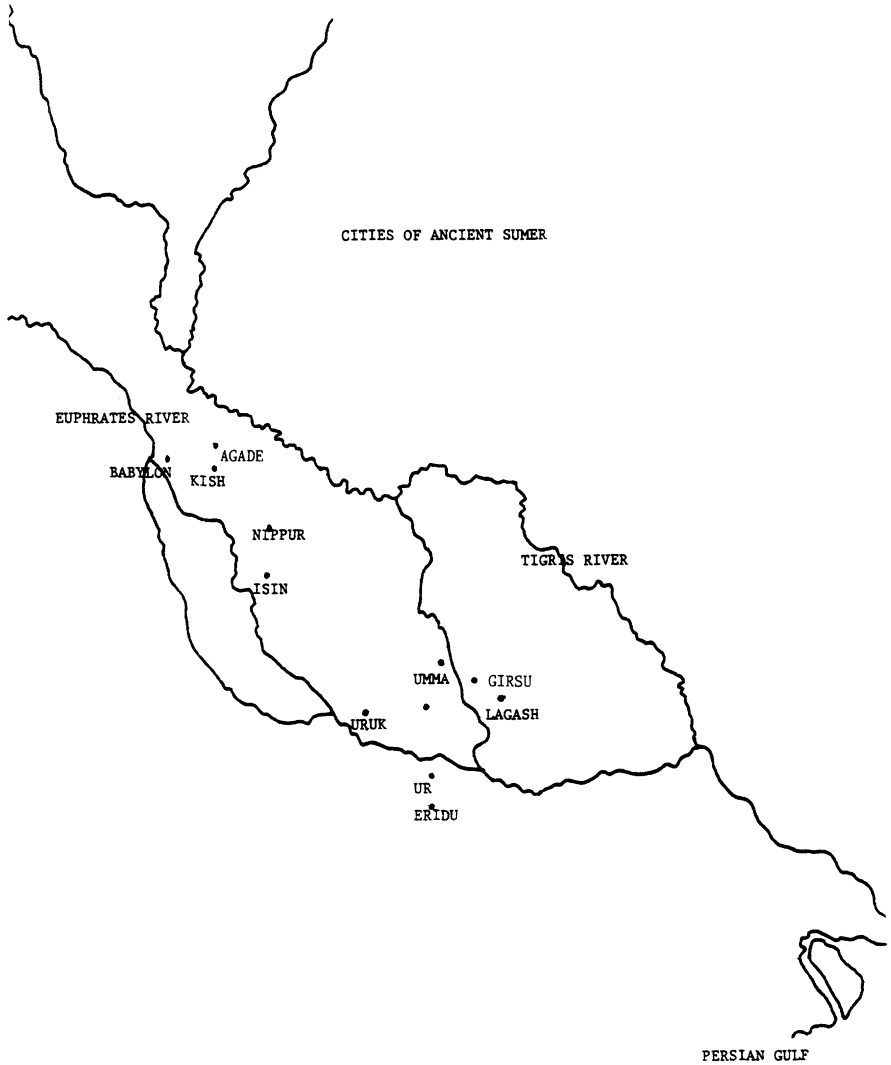
⁵⁸ George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," in *The Biblical Archeologist Reader* 3, ed. E. F. Campbell, Jr. and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday-Anchor, 1970), p. 39.

whole community of interests and that is capable of finding its own order, of coordinating its will with others, and of being enlightened by other lives. Technological developments have brought us to a point where we can and therefore must take responsibility for maintaining ecological balances, for cooperating with nature rather than trying to get the better of it. Humanity has become one. No one can now avoid the realization that we as a species are dependent on one another for maintaining this small global garden in good health. Yet our experience of interdependency is different from the Sumerians in that it is self-centered.

Valuing diverse experience is not just a plank in the platform; it is adjunct to the reevaluation of nature. Each person's own historical experience provides a way of coping creatively with the present circumstances of our common life. Having developed different strengths, we are a natural resource for one another. The idea of a political order based on the particularity of personal experience has a many-centered, or heterarchical structure.⁵⁹ It includes everyone as we create among our diverse selves a new social reality which continues to be personally transformative. As we discover ways to restructure the family and social life so as to empower one another, the need for anyone to have power over another is obviated. New forms of religiosity are emerging that express a sense that order depends on variety and remind us not to allow a collapse into sameness. If as some say, "the personal is political," politics must be once again, as in prebiblical times, religious. As we reach behind patriarchy to recover the values of diversity in nature and culture, we encompass the achievement of a responsible self, and go beyond it to realize our interdependability. In doing so, we recover the notion of cosmic interdependency expressed in the ancient idea of the Sacred Marriage of heaven and earth.

⁵⁹ James Ogilvy, *Many Dimensional Man: Decentralizing Self, Society and the Sacred* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 115ff.

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Why It was Rape: The Conceptualization of Rape in Sumerian Literature

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INTRODUCTION

In an article published in *NIN: Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity*, Jo Ann Scurlock argues that the encounter between Ninlil and Enlil in the Sumerian composition “Enlil and Ninlil” is not rape, but rather the “ruination of an unmarried woman.”¹ She bases her argument on a comparative approach to the study of ancient documents according to which “information drawn from any source may be profitably compared with any other, provided that proper care is taken to avoid decontextualization.”²

Scurlock interprets the episode within the framework of Sumerian and ancient Near Eastern law,³ and concludes that there was indeed no rape in the modern sense of the term in the ancient Near East. Rather, “the Sumerian laws on intercourse with married women were intended to punish adultery, not rape . . . [and] [t]he treatment of intercourse between unmarried persons in Sumerian law has even less to do with the crime of rape as we know it.”⁴

A somewhat similar conclusion was reached by Gwendolyn Leick in 1994. She states that in texts such as “Enlil and Ninlil,” “[t]he concept of rape is inappropriate . . . since these myths are not concerned with social customs and institutions but portray the activities of deities in a world largely devoid of human regulations.”⁵

In this study, I submit that the ancient Mesopotamians did have a concept of rape as we understand it and that a better way to interpret the rape of Ninlil is by comparing it with similar episodes in analogous compositions. Therefore, I will discuss Ninlil’s deflowering in “Enlil and Ninlil” *exclusively* within the framework of Sumerian literary texts, and re-evaluate it vis-à-vis the descriptions of the rape attested in two other Sumerian literary compositions.

DEFINITION OF RAPE

Before beginning my investigation, I wish to put forward a definition of rape as the act of forcing a woman or a man to submit to sexual intercourse against her or his

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1. J. A. Scurlock, “But Was She Raped? A Verdict through Comparison,” *NIN* 4 (2003): 103. For a complete bibliography about the composition “Enlil and Ninlil,” see Scurlock, 2 n. 2.

2. *Ibid.*, 61.

3. For an overview of the legal treatment of rape in the ancient world, with emphasis on ancient Near Eastern sources, see S. Lafont, *Femme, Droit et justice dans l’antiquité orientale: Contribution à l’étude du droit pénal au Proche-Orient ancien* (Freiburg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 133–71.

4. Scurlock, 73.

5. G. Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994), 51.

will.⁶ This definition is extremely broad and stresses the non-consensual element of the sexual act. It is important, however, to clarify my understanding of rape in the context of the present study, because definitions of rape tend to vary not only diachronically, but also synchronically.

RAPE IN SUMERIAN LITERARY TEXTS

At present, clear descriptions of rape are found in two Sumerian literary compositions: “Enki and Ninhursaĝa,” where Enki rapes three of his daughters, and “Inana and Šukale-tuda,” in which the goddess Inana is raped by Šukaletuda.

The plots of these compositions are well known, and need not be summarized here; only the pertinent passages will be discussed. In particular, I will focus on the evidence to support the argument that these were rapes, the nature of the participants, and the consequences of the encounter.⁷

“ENKI AND NINHURSAĜA”

The first composition describing rape is “Enki and Ninhursaĝa.”⁸ There is no consensus among scholars concerning the nature of Enki’s abnormal sexual behaviors. Whereas there is no doubt that Enki has sexual relations with his daughters, who are all defined as *lu₂-tur* “young one,” not all scholars read them as rape.⁹

Enki’s first encounter, with the goddess Ninhursaĝa, is difficult to interpret. There does not seem to have been sexual contact between the two deities, but Ninhursaĝa becomes pregnant and after nine days Nin-nisig is born. Nin-nisig then becomes the object of Enki’s sexual interest, and when she goes out to the marsh, Enki lusts after her and sets out to seduce her, as described in lines 98–101:¹⁰

98. ĝiri₃-ni l₁-a ĝi⁸ma₂-a bi₂-in-gub
 99. 2-kam-ma bar-rim₄-ma nam-mi-in-gub
 100. gaba im-ma-an-tab ne im-ma-an-su-ub
 101. ^den-ki-ke₄ a šaĝ₄-ga ba-ni-in-ri

6. T. M. Lambert, “Rape, Definitions of,” in *Encyclopedia of Rape*, ed. M. D. Smith (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2004), 169–70, points out that “The definition of rape varies by time period, place and gender,” although a “common perception of rape is that it involves the nonconsensual penile penetration of the vagina.” Nowadays, the broadest definition of rape is the one which was introduced in 1998 by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. According to the Tribunal, rape was defined as “a physical invasion of a sexual nature, committed on a person under circumstances which are coercive” (quoted by Lambert, “Rape,” 170).

7. An issue which will not be addressed in the present paper is the recognized dichotomy between the male sexuality represented in the Sumerian literary texts, which put emphasis upon the phallus, and the female sexuality of the Love Songs, focused on the vulva. Leick, *Sex and Eroticism*, 48ff. provides ample evidence and bibliography.

8. For edition, see P. Attinger, “Enki et Ninhursaga,” *ZA* 74 (1984): 1–52. For interpretation, see B. Alster, “Enki and Ninhursag,” *UF* 10 (1978): 15–25. He saw in the composition a set of irregular sexual behaviors, culminating in the sequence of incestual encounters between Enki and his daughters. The last coupling, between Enki and Uttu, is interpreted by Alster as a rape “which did not lead to normal impregnation because the seed was removed from Uttu’s womb and planted in the ground instead” (Leick, *Sex and Eroticism*, 36, discussing Alster’s interpretation). Note however that for Alster, the main theme of the text is “the creation of the first ordinary males and females” (p. 25), as opposed to the extraordinary ones who have been begotten throughout the composition. For the most recent interpretation, see Leick, 30–41. Leick does not view any of Enki’s sexual intercourses as rape, but as incestuous couplings and is inclined to see strong satirical overtones in the composition (esp. pp. 30–31).

9. See previous note and Leick, *Sex and Eroticism*, 30–37, for the various interpretations. Also note that at present the composition is known from only three manuscripts, AO 6724, CBS 4561, and UET 6/1, *contra* Leick, who claims it was well known among Mesopotamians.

10. Line numbers follow Attinger’s edition.

98. He put one foot on the boat,
99. He put the other (foot) on the dry land.
100. He grasped her by the chest and kissed her.
101. Enki ejaculated into her womb.

The verb *tab*, “to seize,” is employed to describe the rape, followed by the more neutral *ne . . . su-ub*. The expression *gaba tab* is also used to describe Enki’s rape of his daughter, Ninkurra, later in the composition. In “Enki and Ninhursaga,” force and coercion are used.

The manuscript tradition is, however, not uniform. According to manuscript A (= CBS 4561) from Nippur, Ninkurra becomes pregnant with Uttu. Here the manuscript breaks off, but the narrative is resumed by manuscript C (AO 6724), of unknown provenience. In this version, Ninkurra becomes pregnant with Nin-imma, with whom Enki in turn becomes infatuated (lines 11–14):

11. $\hat{g}iri_2$ -/ni diš-am₃\ma₂-a bi₂-gub
12. min-/kam-ma-am₃\bar-rim₄-ma¹(BA) u₃-bi₂-gub
13. gaba šu im-mi-in-dab₅ ur₂-ra-na nu₂-a
14. lu₂-tur $\hat{g}i\check{s}_3$ im-mi-in-du \check{g}_4 ne im-ma-ni-in-su-[ub]
11. First he put his foot on the boat,
12. Then, after having put it on the dry land,
13. He seized her by the chest and lying at her loins,
14. He copulated with the young one and kissed her.

In this manuscript, the expected sequence is used in conjunction with the lexicon attested from manuscript A.¹¹ In both cases, however, the notion of force is maintained, thus indicating the non-consensual nature of the encounter.

Enki’s sexual encounter with Uttu is radically different from those with his other daughters. First, Ninhursaga warns Uttu about Enki’s presence in the marshes (lines 128–32). Second, Uttu is instructed on how to behave when Enki ultimately approaches her. The passage is fragmentary and some 10–15 lines are missing, but it is clear that Uttu is advised about a specific course of action, which she duly follows. Third, Uttu’s preparation for her encounter with Enki resembles that of a spouse waiting for the groom (lines 147–51):

147. [ukuš₂ sur-ra-na[?]] de₆-um
148. / $\hat{g}i\check{s}$ hašhur\[gu ul-ul]-ba de₆-um
149. $\hat{g}i\check{s}$ geštin ga-ra-an-ba de₆-um
150. e₂[?]-a saman₂- $\hat{g}u_{10}$ he₂-dab₅
151. ^den-ki-ke₄ saman₂- $\hat{g}u_{10}$ he₂-bi₂-in-dab₅
147. Bring [*pressed* cucumbers],
148. Bring apples in their . . . ,¹²
149. Bring grapes in their bunches,
150. In the house(?) you shall hold my halter!
151. Enki, you shall hold my halter.

11. The sequence attested in manuscript A goes back to a model which omitted the sentence *ur₂-ra-na nu₂-a/lu₂ tur $\hat{g}i\check{s}_3$ im-mi-in-du \check{g}_4* found in the more complete manuscript C. Alternatively, manuscript C was trying to simplify a concept too convolutedly expressed by A. Be that as it may, it seems likely that in A *$\hat{g}i\check{s}_3$ - . . . du \check{g}_4* is implied by both *ne . . . su-ub* and *a . . . ri*.

12. See Å. W. Sjöberg, “A Hymn to Inanna and Her Self-Praise,” *JCS* 40 (1988): 165–86, esp. 174 for a discussion of this problematic line. Attinger, “Enki et Ninhursaga,” 74 translates *gu ul-ul-ba* “en leur cordes.”

The thematic parallels with the Love Songs, especially those relating the groom entering the bride's abode bearing gifts, are very strong in this section.¹³ Before approaching Uttu's house, Enki assumes the identity of the gardener who had given him the goods he was to bring to Uttu (lines 167–76):

167. ^den-ki-ke₄ igi-ni im-ma-an-sig₇-sig₇ ḡigru šu bi₂-in-du₈
 168. ^den-ki-ke₄ ^duttu ḡiri₃ im-ma-an-gub¹⁴
 169. e₂-na al-dub₂-dub₂-e ḡal₂-u₃ [ḡal₂-u₃]
 170. a-ba-me-en za-e-me-en
 171. ḡe₂₆-e nu-ḡi¹⁵kir₆ ukuš₂ ḡi¹⁵hašhur [ḡi¹⁵ḡeštin] he₂-am₃-še₃ ga-mu-ra-ab-šum₂
 172. ^duttu šag₄ hul₂-la-ni-ta ḡe₂-e ḡal₂ ba-an-taka₄

167. Enki beautified his face and took a staff in his hand.
 168. Enki walked to Uttu's (house).
 169. He knocked at her house: 'Open up! [Open up!]'
 170. 'Who are you?' (Uttu asked).
 171. "I am the gardener. I brought cucumbers, apples, and [grapes] for your satisfaction!"¹⁵
 172. Joyfully, Uttu opened the house.

I will return to the *topos* of the gardener later in this essay. Suffice it to say here that I do not believe it a coincidence that Enki assumes this specific identity when he approaches Uttu.¹⁶ From the text, it is clear that Uttu is eager to meet with her suitor, as shown by her eagerness in opening the door of her house. The text is ambiguous as to whether Uttu is aware of the gardener's true identity, but Ninhursag's warnings earlier in the composition suggest that Uttu knows exactly what is happening.¹⁷ However, it is clear that the encounter between Enki and Uttu is not an attempted rape, but rather a failed sexual encounter.

Three different rapes can therefore be identified in "Enki and Ninhursag": they involve Nin-nisig, Ninkurra, and Nin-imma. In each of these cases a father has nonconsensual intercourse with his young and virgin daughters, the rape in this case being aggravated by incest.

There are consequences to be endured for such sexual misconduct. The final section of the composition is devoted to describing the assemblage of illnesses which befall Enki in the aftermath of his actions. Although a definitive link between the incestuous rapes and the illnesses is hard to prove, I suggest that Enki becomes sick as a consequence of his excessive sexual exploits. After all, the plants he eats after having raped his daughters are the products of the sperm with which he was not able to impregnate Uttu. That is, the ingestion of the plants is a kind of alimentary incest.

13. See Y. Sefati, *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature: Critical Edition of the Dumuzi-Inanna Songs* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan Univ. Press, 1998), 101–4 with references.

14. For ḡiri₃—gub, see F. Karahashi, "Sumerian Compound Verbs with Body Part Terms" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2000), 89–92.

15. Following Attinger, "Enki et Ninhursaga," 23, "pour satisfaire ton désir (?)." Note that K. Volk, *Inanna und Šukaletuda: Zur historisch-politischen Deutung eines sumerischen Literaturwerkes* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995), 36 n. 261, suggests "nach Wunsch(?)" for he₂-am₃-še₃.

16. See M. L. Besnier, "Temptation's Garden: The Gardener, A Mediator Who Plays an Ambiguous Part," in *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Simo Parpola and R. M. Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Project, 2002), 59–70.

17. Besnier, "Temptation's Garden," 61, is uncertain with respect to Uttu's knowledge.

INANA AND ŠUKALETUDA

The second Sumerian literary text describing a rape is “Inana and Šukaletuda.”¹⁸ This composition is about the rape of a senior goddess in the form of a grown woman by a mere mortal, and a quite humble one at that.¹⁹ Inana is raped by Šukaletuda after having come to rest under a solitary poplar tree located at the edge of Šukaletuda’s plot of land. In this passage, the sexual act is described by two verbs: $\hat{g}i\check{s}_3 \dots dug_4$, “to copulate,” and $ne \dots su-ub$, “to kiss” (lines 117–25):²⁰

117. $\check{s}u-kal-le-tud-da zag sar-ra-/ka\backslash-ni igi im-ma-ni-/sig_{10}\backslash$
 118. $^d inana-ke_4 \text{ } ^{u\check{g}_2} dar_4 me imin gal_4-la-na\backslash[\dots]$
 119. $^{u\check{g}_2} dar_4 me imin gal_4-la-na [\dots]$
 120. $su_8-ba \text{ } ^d ama-u\check{s}um-gal-an-na-da [\dots]$
 121. $gal_4-la kug-ga-na lu_2 SU x [\dots]$
 122. $\check{s}u-kal-le-tud-da mu-un-du_8-du_8 da-/ga\backslash-[na ba-nu_2]$
 123. $\hat{g}i\check{s}_3 im-ma-ni-in-du_4 ne-im-ma-[ni-in-su-ub]$
 124. $\hat{g}i\check{s}_3 ba-ni-in-du_4-/ga\backslash[ne ba-ni-in-su-ub-ba]$
 125. $zag sar-ra-ka-ni im-ma-si-/in\backslash-[gi_4]$

117. Šukaletuda, at the edge of his plot, saw her.²¹
 118. Inana . . . the cloth of the seven mes over her vulva.
 119. She . . . the cloth of the seven mes over her vulva.
 120. Together with Amašumgalanna, the shepherd, . . .
 121. Over her pure vulva . . .
 122. Šukaletuda loosened (the cloth) and [lay down] in the sleeping place,²²
 123. He had intercourse with her there and kissed her there.
 124. Having had intercourse with her [and having kissed her]
 125. He [went back] to the edge of his plot.

That this was not consensual sex is proven by Inana’s reaction when she wakes up (lines 126–31 and parallels):

126. $ud im-zal \text{ } ^d tu im-ta-/ed_2-a\backslash-ra$
 127. $munus-e ni_2-te-a-nu igi im-kar_2-/kar_2\backslash$
 128. $kug \text{ } ^d inana-ke_4 ni_2-te-a-ni igi im-kar_2-kar_2$
 129. $ud-ba munus-e nam gal_4-la-na-\check{s}e_3 a-na im-gu-lu-u_8-a-bi$
 130. $kug \text{ } ^d inana-ke_4 nam gal_4-la-na-\check{s}e_3 a-na im-ak-a-bi$
 131. $pu_2 kalam-ma-ka u\check{s}_2 bi_2-ib-si-si$
 132. $pu_2 \text{ } ^{\hat{g}i\check{s}_3} kiri_6 kalam-ma-ka u\check{s}_2-am_3 i_3-tum_3-tum_3$
 133. $arad_2 lu_2-/u_3\backslash u_2 il_2-i-de_3 \hat{g}en-na/u\check{s}_2\backslash-am_3 i_3-na_8-na_8$

18. Edited by Volk, *Inanna und Šukaletuda*.

19. Leick, *Sex and Eroticism*, 52–53, points out that Inana “is not to be used as an object of phallic impulse,” despite her being the goddess of sexuality and love. Indeed, as Leick puts it, “As far as [Inana] is concerned . . . intercourse during a deep sleep is not what she would call an erotic experience worth having” (p. 53).

20. For a discussion of these two terms, see the bibliography collected by P. Attinger, *Éléments de linguistique sumérienne* (Freiburg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 540–47, and more recently M. Jaques, *Vocabulaire des sentiments dans les textes sumériens: Recherché sur le lexicon sumérien et akkadien* (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2006), 144 nn. 328 and 329.

21. This is a problematic passage, as the verb is not completely preserved in any of the sources.

22. Parallel to “Enlil and Ninlil,” 87, as already noted by Volk, *Inanna und Šukaletuda*, 187; $^d en-li_2-le nam lu_2 abul-la-ra da-ga-na ba-nu_2$, “Enlil, as the gatekeeper, lay down with her in the chamber.”

134. geme₂ lu₂-u₃ a si-si-de₃ ġen-na uš₂-/am₃\[im]-mi-ib₂-si-si
 135. saġ gig₂ uš₂-/am₃\i₃-na₈-na₈ zag-bi nu-/un\ -zu

126. When the day had dawned and Utu had come out,
 127. The woman examines herself.
 128. Pure Inana examines herself.
 129. At that time, what is it that the woman should destroy on behalf of her vulva?
 130. What is it that Pure Inana should do on behalf of her vulva?
 131. She filled the wells of the land with blood!
 132. It was blood that the wells of the orchards of the land yielded!
 133. It was blood that the slave who went to collect firewood drank!
 134. It was blood that the slave girl who went to draw water drew!
 135. It was blood that the Black-Headed people drank! No one knew the end of it!

Inana's reprisal is an indication that the sexual intercourse did constitute an offense against the goddess. In retaliation, she sends three plagues to afflict mankind in order to force them to give up the culprit, who, upon Enki's advice, is hiding among them. The plagues include the filling of the wells with blood (lines 129–35), a terrifying storm which sweeps through the land (lines 187–91),²³ and the blockage of streets (lines 216–18).²⁴ Eventually, Enki reveals Šukaletuda's hiding place. Inana sentences him to death, although his name shall be preserved in songs.

In this case, the rapist uses stealth rather than force, but the result is the same: a male, in this instance a mortal, sexually abuses a female, and a goddess at that. Šukaletuda was aware that Inana was a goddess, as evidenced not only by the fact that he sees her coming clouded in a divine light, but he also recognizes she is wearing the divine mes.²⁵

“ENLIL AND NINLIL”

Comparison between the two compositions discussed above and “Enlil and Ninlil” clarifies the nature of the episode described here. Enlil sexually assaults Ninlil, who is consistently referred to as ki-sikil, and impregnates her.²⁶ The dynamics are illustrated in lines 46–53 of the composition:

46. a-a ^den-lil₂ MES-ga-e²⁷ dirig-ga-am₃
 47. ġiš₃-bi na-mu-un-dug₄ ne-bi na-mu-un-su-ub
 48. kiġ₂-kiġ₂-a-na šu-ni ba-an-dab₅

23. /dungu\mu-un-u₅ dur₂ im-gub-be₂ gaba im-.../tu₁₅-[u₁₈]-lu mar-uru₅ huš igi-še₃ mu-un-[ši/na-ġen]/pi-/li\pi-li dal-ha-mun egir-ra-ni-še₃ [im-uš₂]/ab-/ba\š-u₂-š-u₂ inim-kur₂-dug₄-dug₄ ad-gi₄-gi₄ [...]7 a-ra₂ 7 an-ed-en-na mu-un-da-/su₈-su₈\[ge-eš], “She (Inana) mounted a cloud and as she placed a seat (there), . . . The South Wind and a terrible storm proceeded before her. The *pilipili* and a dust storm followed her. Abbašū and Inimkurdugdug, the advisers, [. . .]. Seven times seven helpers stood beside her in the high plain.”

24. [umbin]/KA\su-ug-ga diš-am₃ šu im-ma-an-ti/[he]-/en\du kalam-ma-ka bi₂-in-/gi₁₆\-ib/[uġ₃ saġ]-gig₂ umbin KA su-ug-ga mu-na-ta-ed₂-e, “She took a single *enlarged* . . . in her hand. She blocked the highways of the land with it. The Black-Headed people were going in/out because of the *enlarged* . . .”

25. See especially lines 103–5 and parallels: [^dgidim dili du-ra igi]/mu-ni\-[in-du₈]/[dingir dili]/du-ra\[\ġišk_{im} mu-ni-in-zu]/me šu du₇-du₇-/da\[\igi bi₂-in-du₈], “He [saw a solitary ghost approaching. He recognized her as a solitary deity] approaching. [He saw] one who had the perfect mes.”

26. See J. S. Cooper, “Virginity in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East*, 97. In the present context, this is significant vis-à-vis Enki's daughters' designation as lu₂-tur.

27. MES-ga must be an epithet for Enlil, as already suggested by H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil: Ein sumerischer Mythos aus Nippur* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1978), 126–27, but the reading and meaning escape me.

49. ġiš₃-bi na-mu-un-dug₄ ne-bi na-mu-un-su-ub
 50. KU²⁸ peš₁₀ tur-ra-še₃²⁹ im-ma-da-ab-nu₂-e
 51. ġiš₃-bi im-ma-ni-in-dug₄ ne-bi im-ma-ni-in-su-ub
 52. ġis₃ l₁ dug₄-ga-ni ne l₁ su-ub-ba-ni
 53. a^duen-^daš-im₂-babbar-ra šag₄ mu-na-ni-ri

46. Father Enlil . . . *sailing* downstream,
 47. He did have intercourse with her, he did kiss her.³⁰
 48. He seized the one he was seeking *by her/with his hand*,
 49. He did have intercourse with her, he did kiss her.
 50. *At the place* on the small riverbank he made her lie down.
 51. He had intercourse with her there and he kissed her there.
 52. In copulating with her once, in kissing her this once,
 53. He ejaculated the seed of Sîn-Ašimbabbar into her womb.

The sexual act is once again described by the verbs ġiš₃ . . . dug₄ and ne . . . su-ub and it takes place along the river Enlil was sailing upon after having boarded a boat in order to more easily seize Ninlil.³¹

That this was not consensual sex is witnessed by Ninlil's refusal, expressed by the goddess when Enlil first approaches her (lines 28–29):

28. [lugal-e ġiš₃] ga-e-dug₄ mu-na-ab-be₂ nu-un-da-ra-ši-ib-še-ge
 29. [^den-lil₂-le ne ga-e-su-ub mu-na-ab-be₂ nu-un-da-ra-ši-ib-še-ge
 28. [The lord] said: “Let me have [sex] with you!” but she would not agree with him.
 29. Enlil said: “Let me kiss you!” but she would not agree with him.

Ninlil's reasons for refusing are given in lines 30–34 and are relevant to the present discussion, since they repeatedly stress how Ninlil is an inappropriate sexual partner:

30. gal₄-la-ġu₁₀ tur-ra-am₃ peš₁₁ nu-un-zu³²
 31. šu-um-du-um-ġu₁₀ tur-ra-am₃ še su-ub nu-un-zu
 32. ama-ġu₁₀ ba-zu-zu šu-ġu₁₀ mu-un-sag₃-ge
 33. ad-da-ġu₁₀ ba-zu-zu šu sa₂-bi mu-un-e
 34. a-da-lam ma-la-ra dug₄-ga-ġu₁₀-uš nu-me-e ba-na-silig-ge-en³³

28. See J. S. Cooper, review of H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil*, *JCS* 32 (1980): 182, for du_r₂ as a possible reading of KU in this context.

29. It is possible that in this line a word-play was meant with line 30 (see below), based on the homophony between peš₁₀ and peš₁₁.

30. For the positive and epistemic function of na- in verbal chains, see now M. Civil, “Modal Prefixes,” *ASJ* 22 (2000 [2005]): 37. For a different interpretation see Cooper, review of Behrens, 182, who suggests a prohibitive nuance for this verbal chain.

31. The episode of the boat is puzzling, as it is not clear why Enlil would need to use a boat to get to Ninlil, who is bathing in the river, but is likely to be close to the bank. Interestingly enough, however, Enki too uses a boat to gain access to his daughters when it is time to have sex with them, as already noted by Cooper, review of Behrens, 179.

32. For the possible ironic overtones of this line, see P. Michalowski, “A Man Called Enmebaragesi,” in *Literatur, Politik und Recht in Mesopotamien: Festschrift für Claus Wilcke*, ed. Walther Sallaberger, K. Volk, and Z. Zgoll (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 199.

33. This is a problematic line, as already noted by Cooper, review of Behrens, 181, 185. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil*, 221, translates “Nun(mehr) wird mich niemand daran hindern, (darüber) mit (meiner) Freundin zu sprechen!” The latter is followed by ETCSL: “But right now, no one will stop me from telling this to my girlfriend!” I am more inclined to see the girlfriend siding with Ninlil's parents rather than with Enlil, although, given the difficulty of the passage, both options remain open.

30. My vagina is small, it does not know how to stretch.
31. My lips are small, they do not know how to kiss.
32. My mother will hear of it and she will slap my hand.
33. My father will hear of it and he will lay hold of me.
34. Then, upon my telling about it to my girlfriend, *she will not speak to me . . . !*

This, in turn, must have played a role in the penalty inflicted upon Enlil.³⁴

In response to Ninlil's refusal, Enlil, like Enki before him, decides to use coercion and force in order to satisfy his desire for her. This is explicit in line 48, where the verb *dab₅* is used to describe Enlil's actions. That these actions were considered extremely severe is evidenced by the fact that he is called *u₂-zu g₄*, "ritually unclean, polluter,"³⁵ and that the assembly of the gods orders him to leave Nippur (lines 56–63):

56. di ġir gal-gal ninni-ne-ne
 57. di ġir nam tar-ra-ra imin-na-ne-ne
 58. ^den-lil₂ ki-ur₃-ra im-ma-ni-in-dab₅-be₂-ne
 59. ^den-lil₂ u₂-zu g₄-ga iri-ta ba-ra-ed₂
 60. ^dnu-nam-nir u₂-zu g₄-ge iri-ta ba-ra-ed₂
 61. ^den-lil₂ ni ġ₂-nam-še₃ nam mu-un-tar-ra-ke₄
 62. ^dnu-nam-nir ni ġ₂-nam-še₃ nam mu-un-tar-ra-ke₄
 63. ^den-lil₂ i₃-ġen ^dnin-lil₂ in-us₂
56. The fifty great gods
 57. And the seven gods who decide the destinies
 58. Had Enlil seized in the Kiur.
 59. Enlil, the impure, abandoned the city,
 60. Nunamnir, the impure, abandoned the city.
 61. Enlil, according to that which he has decided,³⁶
 62. Nunamnir, according to that which he had decided,
 63. Enlil went. Ninlil followed him.³⁷

Enlil's punishment is unusual. According to the Code of Hammurabi, banishment from a city is the prescribed penalty for a father who has sexual intercourse with his own daughter.³⁸ In legal texts, the penalty for rape varies depending on the social position of the victim as

34. Note, however, that those same reasons make Scurlock's case compelling insofar as they suggest Ninlil does not wish to have sex with Enlil because she is a virgin (lines 30–31) and is afraid of familial and societal contempt (lines 32–34) rather than because she is not interested.

35. Scurlock, 63 n. 14, suggests that in "Enlil and Ninlil" the term may indicate that Enlil had become impure because polluted with Ninlil's blood. However, I do not believe this to be the case. He was expelled from Nippur because the actions he had committed were unacceptable. For *u₂-zu g₄* (Akk. *musukku*), see also M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and in the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting* (Groningen: Styx, 2000), 205–6.

36. See Cooper, review of Behrens, 182, for this line.

37. For variants, see Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil*, 28 and 142.

38. This was noted by Lafont, *Femme*, 134, with discussion. She refers to CH 154: *šum-ma a-wi-lum dumu-munus-su₂ il-ta-ma-ad a-wi-lam šu-a-ti uru u₂-še-iš-šu₂-u₂-šu*, "If a man knows his own daughter carnally, he shall be banished from the city (or the city shall banish him)." J. S. Cooper, personal communication, suggests that the punishment is unusual in CH 154 because the victim is the perpetrator's own daughter and therefore there is no patriarchal authority (be it a father or a husband) whom he offended. Consequently, the customary punishments are not applicable. Analogically, Enlil's punishment must be seen as punishment for an equally reprehensible case, but without the presence of a patriarchal authority that would otherwise be compensated. This explanation fits nicely with the translation of lines 61–62.

well as the social status of the perpetrator.³⁹ The gravity of Enlil's actions is underlined not only by the fact that Ninlil was a *ki-sikil*, that is, a young virgin, but also by the fact that according to the text he disobeyed the laws he himself had established for the community of gods as the leader of that same community (lines 61–62).

Enlil has intercourse with Ninlil three more times. The dynamics of these meetings, however, differ from the first case, as force is definitely not used. Rather, Enlil assumes the identity of the Netherworld's gatekeeper (lu_2 *abul-la*), "river-man" (lu_2 *id₂-kur-ra*), and ferryman (lu_2 *ĝi^{is}m_{a₂}-addir-ra*) and seduces Ninlil, who, although at first reluctant, seems eventually to acquiesce. Stealth is therefore the strategy Enlil opts for in his remaining encounters with the pregnant Ninlil. Indeed, it appears that Ninlil voluntarily sleeps with Enlil in order to protect *Sîn-Ašimbabbar*, the child whom she is carrying. Interestingly, when Ninlil points out that she is carrying Enlil's seed, each of her partners states (lines 85–86 and parallels):

85. a *lugal-ĝu₁₀* an-še₃ he₂-du a-ĝu₁₀ ki-še₃ he₂-du

86. a-ĝu₁₀ a *lugal-ĝa₂-gin₇* ki-še₃ he₂-du

85. My master's seed can go upwards, while my seed shall go downwards!

86. May my seed go downwards instead of my master's seed!

It may be the case, as Scurlock suggests, that these three children—that is, *Nergal*, *Ninazu*, and *En-bililu*—were to be sacrificed in order to ransom Enlil and the already-pregnant Ninlil from the Netherworld.⁴⁰

As the composition ends in an abrupt manner, with a eulogy to father Enlil *and* mother Ninlil immediately following the fourth intercourse between the divine couple, this hypothesis cannot be proved. It is, however, not too farfetched to suggest that Enlil was restored to his rightful place in *Nippur*, with Ninlil in her traditional position as his wife.⁴¹

DISCUSSION

The data presented here are evidence that the cases discussed above were all rapes, according to the definition laid out at the beginning of the paper. This is clearly illustrated by the following elements: first, the victim clearly does not consent to the intercourse and as a consequence force (and, in "*Inana and Šukaletuda*," stealth) is used. This is aggravated in both "*Enlil and Ninlil*" and "*Enki and Ninhursagā*," where the victims are defined either as *ki-sikil* (*tur*) or *lu₂-tur*, stressing that they were young and sexually inexperienced, thus making Enlil and Enki's actions even more reprehensible. Moreover, in all cases, the culprit is punished, although the punishment varies depending on the text. Enlil is exiled, Enki becomes sick, and *Šukaletuda* is sentenced to death.

In addition, I would tentatively suggest that Sumerian literary texts had specialized language to describe rape, represented by the couplet *ĝi š₃ . . . du g₄*, "to copulate" and *ne . . .*

39. Lafont, *Femme*, 133. Lafont concludes (p. 171) that "l'écart entre les penalties [between the rapist of a married or betrothed woman and an unmarried one, free or slave] est remarquable: la mort, ou parfois le versament d'une rançon, dans le premier cas; l'indemnité ou l'amende, éventuellement assortie d'un talion et d'un mariage réparateur, dans le second cas."

40. Scurlock, 66. This interpretation neither addresses nor solves the matter of *Nanna-Suen's* conception, which is a problem in itself.

41. For Ninlil, see M. Krebernik, "Ninlil," *RLA* 9 (2001): 452–61. The couple was paired as early as the Fara Period (see Krebernik, "Ninlil," 453).

s u - u b, “to kiss.” The two verbs have a basic, neutral meaning, and at least for the latter it is hard to imagine a scenario in which kissing is considered harmful. From the evidence discussed above, however, it emerges that this couplet can assume negative nuances depending upon the context.⁴²

“Enlil and Ninlil” does not exist in a vacuum. The dynamics of Enlil and Ninlil’s sexual encounters can be better understood when compared with both “Enki and Ninhursagā” and “Inana and Šukaletuda.” Upon closer examination, it emerges that these compositions not only share a topic, namely rape, but that they also clearly have access to similar pools of ideas and expressions concerning the larger background of the story. Most notably, when Enlil and Enki are intent on seducing rather than raping their victims, they do so in disguise. Enlil assumes three different personas to seduce Ninlil, whereas Enki dresses up like a gardener when it is time to meet with Uttu. As I noted above, all these are cases of consensual sex. I do not believe this to be a coincidence. It is likely that “Enlil and Ninlil” and “Enki and Ninhursagā” go back to a common source. Whether that is the case is at present impossible to prove, but it remains true that the two compositions echo each other.

“Inana and Šukaletuda” is different, however. The human element is represented by the rapist, Šukaletuda, and the consequences of his actions have a strong impact upon the fellow human beings among whom he finds asylum. However, that Šukaletuda’s chosen profession is that of a gardener cannot be a coincidence. This is precisely the persona Enki chooses to assume when he sets out to seduce Uttu. Here too, the contamination among the stories is clear. And as Enlil and Enki, Šukaletuda too has to hide his true identity once the offense is committed. In his case, the dynamics are different, because he, a man, finds refuge and shelter among men, his fellows. But the deception is maintained.

Further investigation is needed in order to highlight the broader ramifications of the motif of rape within the larger landscape of Sumerian literary texts. I hope the observations presented here provide a starting point from which to begin such an investigation.

42. In CU §§6 and 8, quoted in Lafont, *Femme*, 467, the terminology used to describe this action is *n i ĝ₂ - a - ĝ a l₂ - š e₃ . . . AK*, followed by *a . . . g i₄*. The focus of these laws is on the woman’s virginity, which is treated as a commodity. For *n i ĝ₂ - a₂ - g a r - š e₃ . . . AK*, see also P. Attinger, “A propos de AK «faire» (II),” *ZA* 95 (2005): 241.



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KEITH DICKSON

The Jeweled Trees: Alterity in *Gilgamesh*

Who will drive with Fergus now,
And pierce the deep wood's woven shade,
And dance upon the level shore?
—W.B. Yeats, "Who Goes With Fergus?"
(1892)

THE NARRATIVE OF *GILGAMESH*, as *mythic* narrative if not as literary,¹ unfolds within the space between two trees. The first marks the point at which his heroic career authentically begins; the other iconically designates that career's final limit, its *terminus post quem non*. That is to say, the full range of his heroism both literally and figuratively spans the seemingly vast distance between the cedars guarded by the monster Humbaba, whom Gilgamesh and Enkidu kill at the end of Tablet V, and the otherworldly trees that bear rare jewels for fruit in the garden into which the hero emerges alone from the tunnel of the sun at the close of Tablet IX.² In this essay I propose to measure some of that distance by reference to a number of different but closely interrelated scales.

The first such scale is simply topographic: these two trees represent the boundaries of the physical world through which Gilgamesh passes in the course of his career. Whatever arguments can legitimately be raised over specific details of what Campbell styles the heroic "monomyth" (itself by and large an elaboration

¹ The distinction—roughly the same one that structuralism makes between "deep" and "surface" structures (Lévi-Strauss 206-31)—is meant to draw attention to the possibility of older, anonymous underlying meanings ("myth") beneath the layered, deliberate reworkings ("literature") of the *Gilgamesh* narrative. Precisely because of its heavily literary character, Kirk (134f.), for instance, would deny the narrative any mythic status. My presupposition in the present essay is that mythic elements can indeed be recovered despite that literary artifice.

² Unless otherwise noted, all references (by tablet and line) are to the recent translation by George (*Gilgamesh*). Other translations consulted are George's *Babylonian Gilgamesh*, Foster 3-95, Bottéro, Tournay and Shaffer, Dalley 39-153, Kovacs, Gardner and Maier, and Sandars. For an extensive exegetical edition of the Standard Babylonian Version of the epic, see George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh* 444-530.

of Raglan and Propp³), his characterization of the overall shape of the hero's life is certainly true to the mark. For in its most basic form the heroic narrative proceeds along the looping track of Departure outward and subsequent Return, travel to the limits of the world and then the long way home again. Of course, nothing prevents (and much in fact encourages) repetitions of this pattern within a single narrative,⁴ and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (EG) in its Late Babylonian or Standard Version (SB) indeed encompasses two major journeys: the first from Uruk to the Land of Cedars and back (Tablets II-V); the second (and also the last) from Uruk arduously to the ends of the world, then home to Uruk once more (Tablets IX-X).⁵ The western cedars and the fabulous gem-trees presumably somewhere out in the distant east—at the sun's ultimate rising⁶—each represent one of the destinations to which the hero's two journeys extend. They are the poles of his world.⁷

A brief tablet-by-tablet synopsis of the narrative may also prove useful here: (I) Arrogant in his semi-divine status, Gilgamesh of Uruk rules his subjects abusively. The gods in response create his match in the figure of the wildman Enkidu. Lured into sexual intercourse by a prostitute sent to tame him, Enkidu loses his natural powers and becomes "civilized." (II) Enkidu and Gilgamesh fight to a stalemate, after which they adopt each other as brothers. (III) Together they plan an expedition to the Cedar Forest in search of glory. (IV) They travel to the Cedar Forest and have admonitory dreams. (V) They defeat the monster Humbaba, guardian of the forest, and then cut down the cedars and use them to build the great temple door in Nippur. (VI) Back in Uruk, Gilgamesh rejects the erotic advances of Inanna, goddess of sexuality. Enraged, she sends the Bull of Heaven against them, but they defeat it. Enkidu insults Inanna. (VII) As punishment, the gods decree Enkidu's death. On his deathbed, Enkidu conveys to Gilgamesh a vision of the miserable existence awaiting all in the land of Ereshkigal, Queen of the Dead. (VIII) Gilgamesh mourns his dead companion. After initially refusing to bury the corpse, he relents when signs of corruption appear and orders artisans to make a statue of Enkidu. (IX) Distracted, Gilgamesh wanders to the ends of the earth in search of the place where Utnapishtim and his wife, once mortal, now live eternally. Along the way, he wrestles lions, encounters Scorpion-Beings, travels through the darkness of Mount Mashu, and finally reaches a jeweled garden near the tavern of Siduri. (X) Siduri directs him to the ferryman Urshanabi, who conveys him across the Waters of Death to Utnapishtim. (XI) Gilgamesh fails a test to determine whether he is eligible for immortality and must return to Uruk. As a consolation, he is given a plant that insures rejuvenation, but on his way home it is stolen by a snake. Gilgamesh returns empty-handed and rules Uruk wisely and justly until his inevitable death.

³ On the "monomyth," see Campbell 3-46, a brief history of scholarship on the issue in Segal, *Theorizing* 117-34, and a critique in Csapo 201-11. See also Raglan (in Segal, *Quest* 89-175) and Propp for earlier typologies of the heroic narrative.

⁴ One thinks in particular of the great number of *athloi* (labors), *praxeis* (deeds), and *parerga* (side-deeds) that fill the Greek Herakles legend(s), with their highly repetitive narrative situations and motifs.

⁵ For a synopsis by tablets, see note 2. The development of the *Gilgamesh* narrative spans a millennium or more and any number of different voices and hands, from independent Sumerian oral poems dating from roughly 2300 BCE, through the Old Babylonian (OB) version written some 500 years later, to Middle Babylonian (MB) texts completed over the following three centuries. All formed the basis for the Standard Babylonian (SB) poem by the scholar Sin-leqi-unninni, which was composed some time between 1200 and 1000 BCE. For a detailed history of sources and texts, see George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh* 3-70 and Tigay 23-139. A brief summary can be found in George, *Gilgamesh* xvi-xxx, along with a chart (lx).

⁶ On the somewhat vexed issue of the location of the garden, see George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh* 494-98, Alster, "Dilmun," During Caspars 31-44, Butterworth, and Grelot 59f.

⁷ Without further elaboration, Oppenheim remarks with reference to the jeweled trees: "This 'Garden of the Gods' which so patently duplicates the cedar grove seems to have been the scene of an episode dealing probably with another attempt of Gilgamesh to obtain a means of escaping death (cf. the Apples of the Hesperides). What happened in this wondrous garden, we shall most

This last claim would appear to ignore the literal itinerary in the story of the Old Babylonian (OB) text that fills most of Tablet X (see George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh* 159-286, and Tigay 39-54). The fact is that Gilgamesh, after emerging from the tunnel of the sun, enters the garden of jeweled trees *and then* passes *beyond* it—to the “tavern” of Siduri and the shore where Urshanabi’s boat is moored, and finally across the waters of death to the home of Uta-napishti, where he is destined to fail the test and to return to Uruk bound by his mortality. The status of the Uta-napishti episode as an integral part of the narrative has of course long been questioned, and there is consensus that it was not part of the earliest OB version of the tale.⁸ More recently, Abusch’s arguments in favor of reading the Gilgamesh-Siduri episode as a (if not “the”) more original destination of the hero’s wandering, and thus as the goal of an earlier version of the OB narrative itself, lend plausibility to the status of the garden as a truly terminal space and not just one more station along the way to an interview with Uta-napishti. The present essay may to a certain extent provide additional support to that larger thesis. For the time being it is enough to acknowledge the possibility of a narrative in which “Utnapishtim was not part of the tale” and instead “Siduri was . . . the goal of the journey” (Abusch, “Gilgamesh’s Request” 9).⁹ In what follows I propose that whether the failure of his quest for immortality is indicated by the rejection of his (implicit) offer of marriage to Siduri or by his inability to pass the test of wakefulness that Uta-napishti sets before him, either failure is already implicit in his encounter with the jeweled trees themselves. They can prefigure both his alienation from hope of everlasting life and also his literal expulsion from the paradise of Uta-napishti.

The prefigural value of the jeweled trees derives from the fact that this simple topographic scale is itself implicated in more complex and far more significant frameworks of reference. Among the many striking things about *EG* is the narrative’s sophisticated awareness and artful manipulation of spatial registers. Full exploration of this issue is the aim of a separate study; here a few summary points can be made. The story of *EG* unfolds within and across what can be called three major “epistemic” spaces¹⁰: the Wilderness, the City, and the Otherworld. Each

likely never know, not so much on account of the sorry state of preservation of the text, but because the author has the tendency to suppress secondary episodes, doublettes, etc. without eliminating them completely, to which his audience would certainly have objected” (“Mythology” 48).

⁸ On the overall development of the poem, see George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh* 3-70, and Tigay, a brief summary of whose argument is reprinted in Maier 40-49; see also the following note.

⁹ See Abusch, “Development” 615n.3: “The earliest form of the *Epic* did not contain the Utnapishtim episode, but the meeting with Siduri was the climax of Gilgamesh’s wanderings.” His thesis forms the basis of a series of studies; see also Abusch, “Ishtar’s Proposal,” “Gilgamesh’s Request I,” and “Gilgamesh’s Request II.” Summaries of this argument can be found in Maier 110-21.

¹⁰ The term is adapted from Foucault to refer to the complete set of relations—including signs and symbols, whether discrete or arranged in narratives, along with the understandings and practices that follow from them—by which any given culture makes sense of some aspect of its world and of its own position relative to it; for a general definition, see Foucault 191. For example, the *Wilderness* as an “epistemic” space in Mesopotamian culture would not only comprise specific representations of the physical space extending beyond the circles of city, field, and marsh, but also (1) the totality of ways in which that physical space and what happens within it are understood by reference to (and often by contrast with) the space that is defined as human or cultural, and (2) the full range of ways—from beliefs and behaviors (individual and ritualized) to institutions—in which that understanding is embodied.

space provides the venue for encounter with beings (Enkidu, Shamhat, Humbaba, Ishtar, Bull of Heaven, Scorpion Creatures, Siduri, Stone Ones [?], Uta-napishti) and also with objects (cedar forest, tunnel of the sun, jeweled trees, Stone Ones [?], waters of death) that are principally defined by their radical otherness, their qualitative difference from the world of the narrative subject (the trapper, Enkidu, Gilgamesh) who meets up with them.¹¹ To understand these spaces—each one divisible in turn into smaller (though perhaps sometimes culturally “larger” or more important) venues¹²—as mere backdrops to the narrative is to ignore their rich metonymic value and the critical role they play in this and other mythic narratives.¹³ Each space, along with the others it contains, in fact functions as the embodiment and expression of a distinct matrix of ideas and relationships mapped out by Mesopotamian culture in the process of organizing and understanding its world. In a sense, the physical spaces in this mythic narrative are just as much agents in the generation of meaning as the characters are (see Dickson, “*Enki and Ninhursag*”).

This is immediately evident in the contrast between the wild cedar forest and the preternaturally immaculate garden of jeweled trees. The language of the story characterizes the forest of Humbaba chiefly by reference to its density, height, and depth; from its divine proportions it derives a vastness that threatens to dwarf and overwhelm the heroes (V 6). Its physical space, that is to say, embodies a truly ontological dimension (see Shaffer, Forsyth, Hansman, and Marszewski). The monster’s woods are wilderness for 60 leagues (II Y108), and the mountains on which his huge trees grow are themselves exhaustingly steep (V 1f.). The forest is thick with luxuriant growth in the form of both cedars and underbrush, deeply shaded by the canopy of leaves and within its dark, matted thickets of thorns (V 7f.). The path on which Gilgamesh and Enkidu set foot into the groves, though straight and well trodden, is a path made not by human traffic but by the creature himself (V 5) and possibly also the gods. The otherworldliness of the venue is corroborated by the measured leagues after formulaic leagues of space (IV 1-4 ~ 34-38 ~ 79-83 ~ 120-24 ~ 163-65) that separate it in distance and *therefore* also

¹¹ This is of course to oversimplify. The complete set of encounters mediated by “epistemic” space would necessarily also include those between the trapper and Enkidu, Enkidu and Shamhat, the citizens of Uruk and both Enkidu and Gilgamesh, Siduri and Gilgamesh, and so on. As a rule, wherever the story assumes a different agent’s perspective, there is the possibility for a different (and sometimes contradictory) representation of events and values. On the multiplicity of perspectives in *EG*, see Ray, and also note 25 on the issue of “focalization.”

¹² A full inventory of the “epistemic” space of the City as represented in *EG*, for example, would need to encompass the more discrete spaces of Walls, Street, Threshold, Bedroom, Council, Armory, and Temple—each of which embodies its own specific cultural meanings. The liminal space of Dreams, on the threshold between human and divine worlds, would also figure here, as well as being an instance of Otherworld space.

¹³ The role of the garden of jeweled trees in *EG* has for the most part either been ignored, discounted as pure “fairy-tale,” or taken up into larger (and sometimes overly ambitious) studies that on the whole tend to obscure its specific place and function within the story itself. On the one hand, note Kirk’s dismissive remark identifying “elements of fairy-tale or folktale origin—like the garden of jewels, the waters of death and the means found to cross them—which add greatly to the richness of the narrative but little to its central subject” (145). On the other hand, see Widengren’s broad study of the Tree of Life in the ancient Near East, as well as Parpola’s far more ambitious (and often dangerously speculative) essay, with the comments of Cooper. For traces of the jeweled tree theme in other cultures, see Grelot 59f., Horowitz, and George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh* 497, with references.

in quality from the walls and familiar streets of Uruk—a fifteen-day journey to the west, which in fact would have taken lesser men whole months to complete.¹⁴

Associations with a remote, potentially threatening, and essentially non-human world are likewise evoked by the series of spaces into which the hero is cast by his own premonitory dreams during the course of the long journey to the cedars (see Oppenheim, *Dreams*, and Butler 217-39). The fragmented style of their narration by Gilgamesh—the staccato juxtaposition of brief, vivid images—in fact lends them both an energy and a surreal quality that remove what they describe even farther from the realm of ordinary experience. The dreamscapes are generally hostile and profoundly stark, and once more reinforce the physical and ontological distance between human beings and the natural world: violent winds through deep mountain gorges, choking clouds of dust from the ground split asunder (IV Ha₁ 5f.), wild beasts (IV Ha₁ 4f.), oppressive weight of earth (IV 22-25, BO₂ 12'-14'), panic and tremors (IV 100f.), blast of lightning (IV 103), blaze of fire (IV 104-106), thick rain of profuse, deadly ash (IV OB Ni 14f.). These are dreams whose vastness is only amplified by contrast with the smaller, humbler, and implicitly far more fragile space that would contain them—namely, that of the Dream House that Enkidu prepares each night for Gilgamesh (IV 10-13 ~ 43-46 ~ 88-91 ~ 130-33 ~ 171-74; see George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh* 463f.):

Enkidu made for Gilgamesh a House of the Dream God,
he fixed a door in its doorway to keep out the weather.
In the circle he had drawn he made him lie down,
and falling flat like a net lay himself in the doorway.

With its door fixed “against the weather”—to say nothing of the even greater threats afoot in the wilderness at dead of night—Gilgamesh asleep inside the circle on the floor, and his sidekick like a protective net between the dreamer and the looming worlds outside and also within—the House itself arises each night out of the ritualized space brought into being by the slow, repetitive, formulaic acts—deeply cultural, deliberate, and orderly—of preparation for dreaming. These acts, presumably intended both to invoke oneiric powers and at the same time to defend against too deadly an incursion, in turn offer an even more dramatic contrast to the speed and brutality of the visions that assault Gilgamesh. In such raw spaces as these—dominated by the sheer velocity, violence, and mass of elemental forces—no human thing survives for very long, even within the strongest ritual boundaries culture’s magic can erect (see Tournay and Shaffer 107nf, Bottéro 99, and Dalley 126n.33).

I propose that much the same can be said with reference to the garden of jeweled trees in Tablet IX, despite (and perhaps because of) its contrasting silence and stillness (on the garden see George, *Babylonian* 497f., Horowitz 100-02, and Armstrong). The garden, presumably that of Shamash the Sun—though possibly Siduri’s—is reached after an even longer and more arduous trek than were the cedars, this time through steppes and mountain wilderness and finally

¹⁴ On the issue of the possible location(s) of the Cedar Land, see Shaffer, Forsyth, Hansman, Marszewski, and Virolleaud. Whatever its actual location (if any), its construction within the narrative space of *EG* stresses distance from Uruk as an essential feature of its character. On the temporal length of the journey, see George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh* 463.

through the dark solar tunnel itself, its entrance guarded by scorpion-beings. The description of the place into which the tunnel finally opens after twelve double-hours is once again fragmentary and lacunose—this time due to the poor preservation of the text (most scholars assume it would have had a much larger place in the original version)—but through the bright splinters of hematite and carnelian, *sasu*-stone, coral, shards of lapis lazuli, *abashmu*-stone, and agate we can nonetheless catch fleetingly sharp glimpses of a world just as strange as that of the cedar forest: luminous and brilliant and just as inhospitable. This is no less true despite the fact that Gilgamesh's reaction to the jeweled trees (insofar as can be ascertained from the broken text at hand) is one of amazement and wonder rather than dread.

On the surface, the two scenes—themselves both arguably to a large degree products of the spaces in which they are set—could not be more dissimilar. The hero's response at the end of Tablet IX, so unlike the fear inspired in Tablets IV–VI by his dreams and by anticipation of the upcoming encounter with Humbaba, is now one of calm, almost rapt, attraction. This is entrancement, not flight. Vision—the most detached and controlling of the senses—is in fact the one that primarily structures this scene, with its repeated references to sights lovely to behold (IX 174, 176) and the unstated but nonetheless implicitly rich palette of mineral colors. Gilgamesh goes straight ahead into the garden “as soon as he saw them” (IX 172), admires the blossoming carnelian (IX 173), gazes on the lapis lazuli in its foliage and “full fruit” (IX 176), and possibly even stretches out his hand to touch a carob that is actually made of *abashmu* (IX 189)¹⁵—stretches just to touch, it might be asked, or perhaps to pluck and also taste it? The entire episode, even in its fragmentary preservation, unfolds within a space dominated by the quiet splendor of the jeweled trees as reflected in the awe of the one who encounters them; we see them as Gilgamesh does. The most detached and controlling of the senses, sight is for precisely that reason also the most distanced and distancing; as a result, the awe of the hero also reflects an unbridgeable separation in which we ourselves are implicated. Between his hand that reaches to touch the fruit and the *abashmu* that somehow grows here on the branch, there lies an ontological gap far wider even than the one that separates Gilgamesh from the raw world of the Land of Cedars. Despite his very different experience of this radically different garden space, both venues are in their way equally alien and alienating; as such they also express much the same value in the *mythic* space traversed by the hero's career.

More in general on mythic space at the conclusion. What is immediately clear from the description of forest and garden in *EG*, however, is the degree to which their physical differences evoke more fundamental and essentially cultural meanings, along with the degree to which those meanings in these two cases strangely tend to converge. This is a second scale by which the distance between these two venues can be measured. The vastness and depths of the cedar forest, as we have

¹⁵ In both of George's translations of this line (1999 and 2003), the actual touch is qualified as an insecure decipherment: “*He touched a carob, [(it was)] abashmu stone,*” where italics indicate “uncertain renderings.” Foster is more confident: “He took up a carob . . .” (70). Other translations preserve lacunas in the line.

seen, limn the contours of a natural world in which human beings have no native place—or else have it no longer, as is evident from the anthropogonic myth of Enkidu's "fall" in Tablets I and II.¹⁶ A select few humans enter that alien space as heroes-to-be, under the banner of incursion, along the track of a significant quest, and with a mixture of arrogance and trepidation, invading a territory that rarely if ever welcomes them, usually in order to slay its beast, exploit its resources—fine wood for doors—and perhaps (it is hoped) even leave some more permanent mark on the landscape.¹⁷ The Land of Cedars, haunt of Humbaba, is defined precisely by its otherness, its opposition as Nature to the world of Culture as embodied by the hero Gilgamesh and his sidekick, the former wildman and lately defender of shepherds.

A similar opposition *mutatis mutandis* defines the brilliant garden into which the lone hero enters in Tablet IX, although here the positions are somewhat reversed. I have already noted vision as the sense that chiefly structures this episode. To appreciate better its opposition to the Land of Cedars, it will help to shift perspective from what the hero *sees* here to how he is *seen* by those who inhabit this strange new world. At least since the death of Enkidu, if not earlier, what narratologists would call the story's focalization—namely, the point of view from which the story unfolds—has been almost exclusively that of Gilgamesh himself.¹⁸ A change in narrative focus occurs upon (if not a little before) the hero's arrival in the world beyond the tunnel of the sun, however, when he becomes as much the *object* of others' gazes as the subject of his own. In the eyes of that realm's inhabitants, the hand that stretches to touch the fabulous fruit has more in common with the paws of beasts than with whatever immaculate hand it is that cultivates that garden. After all, this is the same hand that will shortly afterwards demolish the mysterious Stone Ones that crew Ur-shanabi's boat (X 92-106; cf. 155-59) and thus necessitate a novel folktale crossing of the waters of death—a hand violent and impulsive, a hand that is best at destroying things. It is in fact less as human than animal (or better, as much animal as human) that Gilgamesh is seen by Siduri and later Uta-napishti and his wife. In the land beyond the tunnel, Gilgamesh of Uruk—the hero-king whom the SB prologue (I 1-8) celebrates as the master of vision, namely the One Who Saw—appears for the first time as *seen*, and seen as radically *Other*.¹⁹

¹⁶ On Enkidu's narrative as one species of "fall" from Nature into Culture, see, for example, Walls 28-32, Mobley 220-23, Tigay 192-213, and Kirk 135f., 145-47.

¹⁷ See Forsyth 21-26 and Hansman on the possibility of actual, historical Mesopotamian expeditions to fell trees in forests variously situated. On heroic motivations, see Alster, "Paradigmatic Character."

¹⁸ De Jong distinguishes three primary narrative functions as follows: "The *text* . . . is the result of the narrative activity of a narrator. The content of this text is the *story* . . . and the agent on this second level is the *focalizer*: it is with his/her/its eyes and in general through his/her/its perception that we . . . perceive the *fabula* . . . This *fabula* consists of the chronological sequence of events, and the agents on this level are the *actors*" (7; *italics mine*). For more on the concept of focalization, see Bal 100-06. Walls 9-92 represents an attempt to approach the text of *EG* with sensitivity to some of its different focalizations, especially with reference to those that center on the erotic gaze. The shifting focalizations in this scene are the subject of an independent study; see Dickson (forthcoming).

¹⁹ Compare Walls, remarking on the transformation of Gilgamesh's face from sexually alluring to desolate: "looking through the eyes of Siduri and Utnapishtim, then, the epic text replaces the erotic gaze of Tablets I-VI with the vision of Gilgamesh's repulsive appearance" (70).

It has often been noted that one effect of Enkidu's death on the hero is a lapse into the kind of natural state that his sidekick had once embodied, and as whose opposite Gilgamesh had originally been cast. There is a shift here in roles and also in the structural categories they imply—whether the result of a desperate identification with the character of the deceased beloved in order to deny his death, some sort of *rite du passage* in the course of mourning, or else a more global rejection of culture itself in an effort somehow to be rid of the mortality that clings to it—and the King becomes the Wildman.²⁰ If the road to the Land of Cedars is one along which Gilgamesh—despite or maybe even thanks to his frightening dreams—slowly acquires an authentically heroic status, the journey to Siduri and Uta-napishti (initially at least) seems to take a dramatically different course. It charts a kind of disintegration, a loss or denial of human culture and a return to something more like the raw natural world from which Enkidu had emerged in Tablet I.

The narrative directly addresses this change by means of a shift in focalization very similar to the one by which Enkidu first came into view through the trapper's eyes (I 117-121). The transformation of Gilgamesh perhaps initially takes place as part of the regular (but usually temporary) disfigurement and self-debasement of ritual mourning, in which hair is torn out and fine clothing shredded (VIII 63f.; 90f.; see Walls 69). Soon afterwards, however, his sorrow over Enkidu's death becomes an expressly narcissistic quest (IX 1-6) for personal immortality, in the course of which Gilgamesh roams the wilderness and gradually also takes on its character (IX 17f. + Si i.2; Kirk 148-51, Foster 40f., and Walls 69):

Like an arrow among them he fell,
he smote the [lions, he] killed them and scattered them.
[He] clad himself in their skins, he ate their flesh.

When Gilgamesh arrives at the shore where Siduri lives (X 4), the narrative emphasizes his wild and unsettling appearance—the hides of animals on his back, the divinity of his flesh belied by the mortal grief within (X 5-9; cf. Walls 90n.83)—as it would have struck a viewer who at first remains unidentified, but who is surely meant to represent someone who natively belongs to the world this creature has just entered:

Gilgamesh came wandering . . .
he was clad in a pelt, and fearful [*to look on.*]
The flesh of the gods he had in [*his body,*]
but in [*his heart*] there was sorrow.
His face resembled one come from afar.

²⁰ Walls speaks of the “abyss of despair” into which Gilgamesh plunges, “driven relentlessly onward by his wrenching heartbreak into isolation, despair, and madness” (68). Leick interprets the act as a measure of the degree to which Gilgamesh has “internalized Enkidu” (269), while the notion of Enkidu as “second self” to Gilgamesh is the core of Van Nortwick's study of the epic. Abusch in turn remarks that Gilgamesh “rejects all human obligations and identities, flees to the wild, where he assumes the identity of his dead friend” (“Development” 617). See Barre 178-81 on the inter-related themes of wandering and grief. Kirk speaks of the transformation of Gilgamesh as an effort to “simulate nature in a typical *rite du passage* inversion” (148f.). On the rejection of culture as a rejection of mortality see (generally) Dollimore and Jager. Kirk argues that Gilgamesh's “rejection . . . of the appurtenances of culture is a rejection of death itself. Just as Enkidu blamed his acculturation for the manner, if not the inevitability, of his dying, so Gilgamesh rejects the actuality of Enkidu's death by seeking out the world of nature, of the animals who were Enkidu's companions and seemed to symbolize freedom, lack of restraint, lack of corruption” (151).

The closing line of this passage, shortly afterwards repeated by Siduri and Gilgamesh himself (X 43, 50), is of course an echo of the same line spoken with reference to the hunter/trapper after his initial meeting with Enkidu by the water-hole in Tablet I (I 121).²¹ Both scenes narrate an encounter with a stranger reflexively, namely by focusing on how that stranger appears to and thereby affects those who see him; and in both, moreover, the formula succinctly relates spatial to ontological distance. However, the scenes differ in how the formula is applied to its referent in each case.²² With respect to the hunter in Tablet I, it expresses the gulf separating wild man from man of culture, animal from trapper, and in so doing marks the experience of otherness as a deeply transformative one. Specifically, it speaks to the physical and emotional changes wrought in the trapper by his encounter with Enkidu. The narrator has of course already (I 105-12) described the beast-man in the course of relating his birth, but the real significance and depth of his otherness are fully experienced only when he is seen through the trapper's eyes (I 117-21). The mere sight of the creature has the power to trouble him deeply and make him despondent, and even to alter his look in much the same way that a long journey can. While he has not literally traveled all that far from home—though it should be recalled that the venue for their encounter is the wilderness, that space (three days' trek out from the city) in which the worlds of nature and culture most violently intersect in acts of hunting and predation—the trapper has nonetheless been transfigured by his face-to-face confrontation with Enkidu. If nothing else, this confirms how far removed he is in ontological space from the awesome thing across the water-hole.

On the other hand, and especially with reference to Gilgamesh in Tablets IX-XI, the analogy in the formula more properly focuses on the traveler as *object*, not subject, of the gaze. Here he is the one who is seen, not the roving master of sight. Its true referent, that is to say, may not be the voyager who returns to his own kin after an extended trip abroad, during which time his experience of strange life has transformed how he appears, marking his face. (This at least seems to be the point of the analogy in the trapper's case.) When predicated of Gilgamesh in the garden, however, the analogy suggests that it is the voyager himself who is foreign, the one who arrives as a stranger in some distant, strange new land. There, in the eyes of those who meet him, his appearance is not just an index of the travails of the journey—how long he has wandered, amidst what dangers, through what sights, and with what suffering—which can of course alter a once (and implicitly still somewhat) familiar face. It is also and even more fundamentally a sign of his status as genuinely Other, of how very different these people are who come among us from such a very great distance. Estrangement is the key

²¹ In the present article I adopt George's 1999 translation (*Gilgamesh*) of the line; his 2003 translation (*Babylonian Gilgamesh*) renders it "his face was like one who has travelled distant roads." Compare Dalley: "His face was like that of a long-distance traveller"; Foster: "His face like a traveller's from afar"; Kovacs: "and his face looked like one who had made a long journey"; and Sandars: "His face was altered like that of one who has made a long journey."

²² The following argument is predicated on the assumption that the attribution of this line to the trapper and not to Enkidu is a certain one; see Dalley 126n.12 and George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh* 450f. Edzard 48-50 interprets the description of the encounter between Enkidu and the trapper as deliberately comic.

issue. What does the face of one who arrives from afar best resemble? Most certainly nothing familiar, nothing at all like what we see around us every day, but instead something totally different—as if not even the same species, perhaps, and at the same time fascinating and disturbing.

Such is Gilgamesh in the eyes of all who encounter him after Enkidu's death. He is a creature whose alterity the weird scorpion guards at the gates of the tunnel in the Mashu Mountains immediately perceive long before he arrives in the garden (IX 48-51):

The scorpion-man called to his mate:
 "He who has come to us, flesh of the gods is his body."
 The scorpion-man's mate answered him:
 "Two-thirds of him is god, and one third human."

By the time Siduri meets him, as already noted, this distinction on the basis of *mixture*—between what would seem to be different portions of different kinds of flesh (divine/human)—has instead become interiorized and therefore *spatial*, and is now expressed as a distinction of inner and outer: "The flesh of the gods he had in [*his body*,] /but in [*his heart*] there was sorrow" (X 7-9). As much as his lapse into a state of nature marks him as a divided or doubled creature—a man who wanders clad in animal skins—this division in turn reveals an even deeper, constitutional split, namely divine flesh wrapped around a fragile and mortally wounded human heart. The uneasy juxtaposition makes for an appearance deeply unsettling to those who have a share in neither animal nor human worlds—Walls interprets Siduri's reaction at the beginning of Tablet X as one of "fear and revulsion" (70)—and who instead belong to the scarcely imaginable *tertium quid* in which Gilgamesh desperately seeks membership. All who encounter Gilgamesh beyond the tunnel are drawn first (despite their disgust) to how he looks, an appearance implicitly marked by its difference from their own (on customary rituals see Abusch, "Gilgamesh's Request I" and Walls 69f.). For it simply cannot be the case—it is false by definition, in fact—that the inhabitants of the land at the end of the world have sunken cheeks, haggard faces, and hearts filled with sorrow. From the perspective implicit in the formulaic claim that "his face resembled one come from afar"—the perspective of one who looks on another who is radically different from oneself—we see the hero through the eyes of Siduri and (later) Uta-napishti.²³ Along with their gaze, our own attention is likewise drawn to the transfiguration of Gilgamesh's body by physical suffering and grief, to his divine flesh somehow weirdly transparent to the human sorrow lodged within it, and also to the nature of his clothing, as if these three features were all in a way unquestionably linked (X 40-45 ~ 113-18 ~ 213-18):

"[why are your] cheeks [so hollow,] your face so sunken,
 [your mood so wretched,] your visage [so] wasted?
 [Why] in your heart [does sorrow reside,]
 and your face resemble one [come from afar?]
 Why are your fingers burnt [by frost and by sunshine,]
 [and why do] you wander the wild [in lion's garb?]"

²³ Note that Tablet IX ends (and the encounter in Tablet X begins) with explicit reference to the shift in perspective, as Siduri raises her eyes (IX 195f.) to watch Gilgamesh. See also Tournay and Shaffer 197 note y; Dalley 9 and Foster 71, however, assign the gaze to Gilgamesh instead.

Wrapped in an animal's hide, the hero has himself become the beast—but even stranger than a beast, since this is a peculiar kind of beast that feels sorrow on account of its knowledge of death. Kirk and others have noted, from a structuralist frame of reference, the narrative's use of a vestimentary code to signify the passage from Nature to Culture and vice-versa (Kirk 146f., Mobley, and Bartra). The acculturation of Enkidu in Tablet II (P 66-71, 110) involves clothing his nakedness along with other culturally significant acts of personal grooming. In Tablet XI (251-70), a fundamentally similar process at the home of Uta-napishti—stripping, washing, discarding of pelts, and donning of immaculate robes—transforms Gilgamesh from a desperate beast into the wiser king who will return to Uruk to rule that city more justly. Between those two scenes the correspondence is clear. Among the jeweled trees at the end of Tablet IX, however, he is neither as clean nor as resigned to his lot. On the contrary, the wild Gilgamesh in the Garden of Shamash is the structural double of Enkidu at the water-hole: both are alien; both are icons—one naïve, the other no doubt sentimental—of Nature as opposed to Culture; both are terrifying savages; and both stand right on the threshold of what to each of them are incomprehensibly strange new worlds.

The scenes are implicitly balanced one against the other by a flawed but still compelling kind of propositional logic. As was Enkidu to the trapper, so is Gilgamesh to Siduri and Uta-napishtim; as Nature (**A**) to Culture (**B**), so Culture (**B**) to Divinity (**C**). To see the scenes this way involves a hermeneutic shift, whereby the question asked predisposes the kind of answer it receives. What from the standpoint of a character's inner *motivation*—*Why does Gilgamesh play the beast?*—resembles narcissistic identification with the dead beloved, loss-driven withdrawal of cathexis (Walls 68f.), inverted *rite du passage*, or wholesale rejection of the morbidity of culture, may well from the standpoint of narrative *function*—with which myths are chiefly concerned, after all—turn much more simply on an attempt to understand an incomprehensible difference by analogy to a difference that is somewhat easier to grasp (see Peradotto). By contrast with the gods, humanity is as rough and uncouth and repellent as is raw nature by contrast with the world of cultured human beings. The identity between king and wildman may therefore be less a psychological or existential event—more the stuff of literature, perhaps—than a matter of the special logic of myths. If **A:B** as **B:C**, then **A=C**. Functionally, Gilgamesh in the Garden is Enkidu at the Water-Hole.

While their itineraries may differ once they cross their respective thresholds, their final destination is of course one and the same. The world into which Enkidu passes, thanks mainly to the guidance of Shamhat, is the one he will later first curse and then fully embrace as he lays dying in Tablet VII. Thanks to the prostitute, Enkidu has become like a god (cf. I 207, II P54), has eaten bread and drunk ale, and worn splendid clothes (VII 134-137); therefore, he should bless the transformation he has undergone, even unto his own death. Gilgamesh, by contrast, will enter the world beyond the tunnel of the sun only far enough to learn—thanks to the guidance of Siduri²⁴—that he can have no permanent place

²⁴ On the analogies among Shamhat, Siduri, and Kalypso in the Odyssean tale, see especially Abusch, "Mourning" 110-21; Abusch also explores the theme in "Ishtar's Proposal" and "Gilgamesh's Request II."

within it, and that he must finally return home to Uruk to die. Despite this divergence in their routes towards death, both Gilgamesh and Enkidu cross their respective thresholds at water-hole and garden as radically other than the worlds into which they venture. Each of them—Gilgamesh directly, Enkidu (perhaps) through a curious kind of mirroring in the trapper's own face—is like “one come from afar.”²⁵

The distance Gilgamesh has traveled by the end of Tablet IX is arguably greater than the distance Enkidu traverses in the course of his “fall.” Here the measurement can be taken by use of a scale analogous to the vestimentary code—nakedness vs. clothing, filthy pelts vs. immaculate robes—uncovered by structuralist analysis. Perhaps even more fundamental than distinctions between Nature and Culture based on what is worn, after all, are those based on what is eaten.²⁶ For a culinary code clearly figures prominently in the early episode of Enkidu's acculturation as one index of his change, where in his prelapsarian state he grazes on grass with the gazelles and drinks from the water-holes (I 110f. ~ 127f. ~ 175f.), but then afterwards learns what properly to do with bread and ale (II 44-46; P 90-105), “the lot of the land” (Mobley 220-23, Bartra, Tigay 202f., and Kirk 146f.). The same issue is present implicitly in the characterization of Gilgamesh during the wanderings that follow Enkidu's death, where his sustenance is presumably quite far removed from the more genteel food in the city. By the end of Tablet IX, Gilgamesh has travelled from the kitchens of Uruk, provisioned by its sheepfolds and rich herds of cattle, its date groves and cultivated fields, first to the rough fare of the wilderness—flesh of lions (IX Si i.2)—and now finally to the incomparably strange stuff that somehow grows on trees in the garden at the end of the passage through the tunnel of the sun. He has passed from Culture to Nature to something quite incomprehensibly alien.

The garden of jeweled trees is in fact a locus of difficult questions. What is this strange garden? How can it transgress the fundamental categories that structure our essentially binary understanding of the world (see Lévi-Strauss 1-74), with its fixed boundaries between opposites? Specifically, what makes possible the passage from mineral to vegetable, dead to living, inert to animate? How can gemstones be fruit? What kind of plant produces what—despite its generative link to process and change—is in fact imperishable and incorruptible? Even more challenging to the cultural imagination, and more germane to the figure of Gilgamesh the Wildman King in Shamash's Garden, is the question of agency, both efficient and final: What hand tends the garden? How is such fruit grown? From what seeds? By what weird agronomy? And perhaps most important of all: What kind of being can pluck and eat and somehow incorporate this jeweled stuff—*abashmu*-stone, lapis lazuli, agate—into the stuff of its own flesh?²⁷

²⁵ Serracino Ingloft notes that “Gilgamesh's dazzlement shows that he is a stranger here; it is not the home of humans but of gods” (14).

²⁶ This is of course the organizing premise of Lévi-Strauss (above, note 1). Consider also Oppenheim's comment (quoted in note 7), which makes explicit what is implicit in all analogies drawn between the jeweled garden in *EG* and the fruit-bearing plants in other mythic “gardens of the gods.”

²⁷ Widengren approaches the tree in Tablet IX from the broad viewpoint of ritual, and therefore considers it artificial: namely, that the branches hung with gems are a simulacrum of the king's role as guarantor of the renewal of life and fertility. See also Hansman. From the viewpoint of its function within *EG*, however, the tree's status as (1) living and (2) the source of divine food cannot be discounted.

Like Enkidu, who gapes like a child and looks askance at the bread and ale set before him in the shepherds' camp (II 44-46), Gilgamesh in Tablet IX has entered a realm whose utter strangeness is marked by the fact that it presents him with food he does not know how to eat. Unlike his sidekick, however, who is successfully taught "the lot of the land" (II P97) by Shamhat, the Wildman in the Garden learns only that this brilliant fruit can never be his sustenance. Its pure, hard, everlasting nature is surely what gives the same gemlike quality to the bodies of those who are able to eat it, but he himself will never have the ability either to effect or to participate in such a transformation.²⁸ In fact, the best he can do—in an episode that recalls the litany of precious minerals and jewels at the close of Tablet IX—is to construct a (more or less) permanent simulacrum of the decomposing body of his friend Enkidu, a statue with "eyebrows of lapis lazuli, chest of gold" (VIII 67-72), and to send the corpse off to the otherworld laden with obsidian, carnelian, lapis lazuli, alabaster, gold, ivory, and silver (VIII 92-219). That is to say, the most that Gilgamesh in his mortal grief can accomplish through the skill of all the craftsmen of Uruk is the translation of perishable stuff into an *icon* of imperishability—a planned *resemblance* merely, but not the real thing.²⁹ For that matter, the material of the statue, however resplendent it is with the suggestion that it has been removed from the world of change and decay, remains nonetheless as inert as the corpse it is meant to replace. It does not live, as Gilgamesh would ardently want it to; nor can it grow, mysteriously, like fruit on a tree.

Moreover, its intended alchemy also fails—no sympathetic magic here—since the precious stuff from which the image of his friend is made of course has no power to communicate its incorruptibility to Enkidu. If the statue is a marvel of gold and lapis lazuli, Enkidu himself has by contrast "turned to clay" (X 68f. ~ 145f. ~ 245f.), the stuff of decomposition (cf. Walls 69). The Garden of Shamash, however, miraculously offers an image of "dead" minerals that are somehow alive and flourishing: carnelian trees burgeoning with what seem to be clusters of grapes, a tree of lapis lazuli that bears leaves and is "in full fruit," stone vials that grow instead of thorns and briars (IX 173-90). In a way, these are themselves simulacra as well, but exquisitely far more perfect ones, true embodiments of what they represent, since in this case the jeweled fruit is figurative of the divinity that eats it—both alive and yet somehow also (like gemstones) incorruptible—and that Gilgamesh himself will neither taste nor possess. It is therefore also a striking measure of the distance that permanently separates him from the object of his desire.

The two spaces—forest and garden, cedars and jeweled trees—between which the hero's career unfolds metonymically represent and also mythically embody his own intermediate position between Nature and Divinity. If he is partly each,

²⁸ See (with caution) Parpola, and also Müller, Grelot 59f. (with references), and Widengren, along with Greek myths of the apples of the Hesperides, descriptions of the island of the Hyperboreans, and the mythical tree in the garden of the Phaikians in *Odyssey* 8. Foster (71n.1) remarks on the rhetorical (and ontological) distance between mundane appearance (carob) and otherworldly (*abashmu*) in this passage. Serracino Inglott (15) speculates on the reference to grapes (IX 173f.) as a prolepsis of Siduri's role as vintner of the gods' "ambrosiac drink."

²⁹ On iconic representation, see Leach 9-16. On the contrast between simulacrum and corpse as a negation of the heroic ideal of "beautiful death," see Walls 65f.

he is also wholly neither, and in both spaces he therefore always remains an interloper, a kind of freak, a beast-king simultaneously alienated and alienating, a stranger "come from afar." From one perspective, the two venues differ from one another as drastically as do filthy animal pelts from the immaculate robes of the gods, or the tough flesh of lions from the unimaginable texture and taste of *abashmu*-stone. In another sense, however, and with specific reference to Gilgamesh caught *in medio situ*, both spaces converge on the image of the alterity that in fact most essentially defines him.

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Notes on Two Ancient Fertility Symbols

by BALAJI MUNDKUR

The importance of human fertility cults, ranging from those of the civilized cultures of antiquity to the most primitive of existing societies, is amply illustrated by myths, rituals and taboos which have been recorded world-wide. In the agrarian communities of the neolithic and chalcolithic periods, anxieties about female fecundity must have been severe and no doubt were sharpened by individual or communal needs for sufficient offspring to overcome high infant mortality and the toll taken by disease. This concern is evident in countless archaeological relics which carry symbols connected with the propitiatory rites of fertility cults.

The artistic expressions of these were diverse, but commonly focussed upon a "mother-goddess" who presided over, and granted the boon of, fertility to her devotees. This power was symbolized by her images, in which her genitals and breasts were exhibited prominently, or invitingly portrayed. She was frequently imagined as pregnant, or as suckling an infant, and her idols were often steatopygous. Such representations are well-known and need no further discussion.

In several ancient cultures, the symbolic abstraction of the mother-goddess and her maternity-granting potential was a triangle whose apex pointed downward, and which was reminiscent of the pubic region of her idols. This motif — the pubic, or sexual, triangle — was variously depicted: it was unadorned or filled with decorative detail, or a simple bisecting line or depression indicated the vulva.

Frequently, the pubic triangle was anatomically inappropriately located or so casually represented that its apex pointed upward, but without at all impairing its powerful symbolism. An incised phalanx of a horse, found in the Danubian region of Rumania and radiocarbon dated to the epipaleolithic period, about 8,759 years ago ⁽¹⁾ is an example (fig. 1a, b, c). It is shaped like a headless, limbless, human body. The inverted pubic triangle, at the lower extremity, is shown by stacked chevrons. Adjoining it is a diamond-shaped pattern which depicts the navel; clever use seems to have been made of the condyles of the bone to suggest the breasts. The nine horizontal strokes on the upper

(*) This work is part of a project supported by the University of Connecticut Research Foundation. I am grateful to Dr William W. Hallo of the Babylonian Collection, Yale University, for permitting me to photograph the shrine shown in fig. 5 and for drawing my attention to the

article by Heimpel.

⁽¹⁾ V. BORONEANT, « Noi date despre cele mai vechi manifestari de arta plastica pe teritoriul Romaniei », *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei, Ser. Plastica*, 19, 1972, pp. 109-16.

back may have had magical significance or may represent hair. Other bones found near it bore incised meanders, zigzags and triangles. Fig. 2 a, b, shows ochre-painted human bones, of the "advanced eneolithic" period, from Southern Spain. The inverted triangle on one of them is recognizable as pubic only because a stylized face with eyes is depicted above it and because it is correctly oriented on other specimens. Zigzags sometimes replace the triangle. Another remarkable bone, also from the neolithic period, found in north-eastern Italy, near Trento, is seen in fig. 3 a, b ⁽²⁾. Suggestions of maternity are conveyed by a human figure, perhaps of an infant, incised on it. Below the figure are three zigzag lines whose meaning is conjectural. Pointing towards the inverted pubic triangle at the base of the bone is what appears to be a symbolic representation of a phallus and testicles. Whether at this early stage in man's social evolution, a biological connection was seen between copulation and eventual childbirth is moot and, in any case, irrelevant for our purpose. Yet another ancient example of the pubic triangle are the small natural clefts or depressions occurring in rock formations in northwestern Libya ⁽³⁾. Engravings of female figures in exhibitionist, "erotic" postures incorporate these natural shapes as vulvar representations. The purpose of all these objects was in all probability cultic.

Clearly, the pubic triangle has had a long history paralleling the development of mother-goddess figurines. However, on artifacts of the neolithic and subsequent periods from the particular regions discussed here, the use of triangles as isolated motifs is so frequent and seemingly so decorative, that their value as expressions of cultic fervour may be questioned. The danger is that even triangles whose pubic connotations are indubitable are apt to pass unrecognized or at least, to be neglected. This is particularly true in the great majority of archaeological studies of painted or engraved ceramics, or of glyptic objects, such as seals and amulets, where the analytic emphases generally lie in directions other than the interpretation of symbols.

Even less stressed is an ancillary motif which often occurs alongside of the triangle in so stylized and "disintegrated" a manner as to obscure its equally long history as a decorative device of symbolic value. This is the representation of the serpent; and its origins are rooted in the primitive religions of the neolithic period. For, the belief that the serpent is the harbinger of human fertility was held almost universally, as it is among innumerable societies even today ⁽⁴⁾. Veneration of the living reptile, or of an image of a fully theriomorphic or anthropomorphic deity with ophidian attributes, derives from human attitudes of great antiquity. This requires separate and detailed consideration in anthropological, archaeological, psychological and mythological terms. Thus the association of the serpent with the pubic triangle was a joining of two sacred elements, and it must have seemed a

⁽²⁾ B. BAGOLINI, « Scoperte di arte neolitica al riparo Gaban (Trento). 1. Figurina femminile e manico decorato in osso dai livelli della cultura dei vasi a bocca quadrata », *Bollettino del Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici*, 10, 1973, pp. 59-78.

⁽³⁾ P. GRAZIOSI, « Le incisioni rupestri dell'Udei El Chel in Tripolitania », *Libya Antiqua*, 5, 1968, pp. 9-36, pls. 10, 28, 29.

⁽⁴⁾ J. HASTINGS, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, 13 vols., Edinburgh, 1952-56.

logical one for primitive mankind in certain areas of the world. This aspect of the evolution of early religious beliefs can be illustrated by archaeological examples so as to facilitate the derivation of imagery which, at first, might seem merely decorative.

I must at the outset state my view regarding the symbolic depiction of serpents. Zigzags and sinuous lines, with or without a terminal arrowhead or dilatations signifying the serpent's head, stacked chevrons and scale-patterns are the commonest substitutes for naturalistic depictions of the animal, though chevrons are sometimes used in place of a pubic triangle. This is specifically justified by examples given below, but it holds true even in innumerable cases where the pubic triangle is not involved. Zigzags and undulating lines have sometimes been equated with lightning or water; and chevrons, with or without a central connecting line, have been regarded as symbols for vegetation. This may be so in particular cases; and there is always the need for cautious separation of those situations where similar designs may be purely decorative. Yet there is compelling evidence from the regions where ophiolatry was an established cult that these symbols primarily identify the serpent in certain objects included among grave-goods and devotional offerings.

Thus, a naturalistic effigy of a coiled serpent of the neolithic period from Priština, Southern Yugoslavia, is engraved dorsally with a prominent zigzag which follows the coils from head to tail-tip ⁽⁵⁾. Archaic seals from Susa bear serpent and scorpion figures, identically arranged except that both are natural-looking in some but stylized in others, the serpents being represented by zigzags ⁽⁶⁾. Effigies in clay of bulls, from Bronze Age Cyprus, where both the serpent and the bull were cult animals, sometimes bear a naturalistic serpent in applique winding over the bull's foreleg and the side of the neck. It is more often duplicated as an incised or painted zigzag or sinuosity ⁽⁷⁾. Chevrons, scale-patterns, undulations and zigzags, all clearly intended to signify serpents, are legion on the funerary pottery of neolithic and Minoan Crete and of classical Greece ⁽⁸⁾, where these animals were connected with the regeneration of the dead ⁽⁹⁾.

Our examples will be taken primarily from Western Asia, and from the Hellenic world of the Eastern Mediterranean. In certain regions where ophiolatry and fertility cults were important, as in Central America and India, the joint symbolism of serpent and pubic triangle is absent. This is remarkable in the case of India, where traditions of *yonī*- or vagina-worship and of ophidian fertility goddesses are strong; remarkable also because

⁽⁵⁾ J. PAVÚK, « Grab des Želiezovce-Typus in Dvory nad Žitavou », *Slovenská Archeológia*, 12, 1964, (pp. 5-68), pp. 13 f.

⁽⁶⁾ G. JÉQUIER, *Cachet et cylindres archaïques*, (*Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse*, VIII), Paris, 1905, p. 25, figs. 56, 68.

⁽⁷⁾ E. GJERSTAD, « Supplementary Notes on Finds from Ajia Irini in Cyprus », *Medelhavsmuseet Bull.*, 3, 1963, pp. 3-40, figs. 2a, 4; V. KARAGEORGHIS, « A Deposit of Archaic Terracotta

Figures from Patriki, Cyprus », *Report, Dep. of Antiquities, Cyprus*, 1971, pp. 27-36.

⁽⁸⁾ W. MÜLLER, F. OELMAN, *Tiryns*, I., (Deutsches Archaeologisches Institut), Athen, 1912; C. ZERVOS, *L'art de la Crète néolithique et Minoenne*, Paris, 1956, pl. 56.

⁽⁹⁾ J. HARRISON, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 3rd ed., Cambridge, 1932, pp. 328 ff.

India's cultural links with Elam and Mesopotamia, where the joint symbolism is outstanding, go back at least to the Sargonid period, c. 2370-2284 B.C. I will show by means of a selected series of early archaeological relics the artistic range of this dual symbolism, leading from the most obvious to the highly stylized. This assemblage demonstrates certain underlying regularities of pattern over a far-flung area of the ancient world. How much these regularities derive from independent expressions of basic human attitudes about procreation, and how much from protohistoric diffusion from a central area or areas of anthropogenesis, it is difficult to say. I shall comment briefly in terms of migration patterns in the concluding section.

I. THE NEAR EAST

Among the earliest Mesopotamian examples of the association of the serpent with child-birth are the nude, terracotta figurines (fig. 4) from al-Ubaid, c. 4200 B.C., excavated by Woolley ⁽¹⁰⁾. Their svelte bodies, reptilian visages and the circumstances of their discovery leave no doubt that they were intentionally fashioned to represent an ophidian deity, and had votive or magical significance. Their precise identity is not known, but Langdon ⁽¹¹⁾ provided strong evidence of the ophidian nature of several deities in the Sumerian and Assyrio-Babylonian pantheon. The pubic triangle of the al-Ubaid idols is prominent and shown by four or five chevrons. It is of interest that pottery accompanying them bore simple, bold rows of four chevrons, or a prominent triangle, or a single, narrow, hatched parallelogram which may have symbolized the serpent.

The object in fig. 5 is Babylonian, and is dated to c. 2700 B.C. ⁽¹²⁾. It is of baked clay and measures 35 x 15 x 7 cm. A pair of hand-moulded, entwined serpents, a well-known Mesopotamian symbol of fertility, is affixed all around the outer sides except in the rear. Inside, three undulating serpents in applique are aligned in parallel, their heads resting on inclined planes set before a stepped chair, or throne, whose back is now damaged. This object was probably meant to represent a private shrine; its exact significance is not clear but it is likely that it is a portable votive offering of the kind commonly placed in temples before the principal deity. In this case, the personage imagined as seated on the throne, or whose effigy may once have occupied it, could have been the Sumerian Innana, or Ishtar, her Semitic equivalent. As the goddess of love and fertility, her primeval, ophidian aspect is evident in a number of ways in liturgical and oracular texts translated by Langdon from cuneiform tablets. It is explicit in her title *ušumgal* (Akkadian for 'great serpent'); and Sumerian hymns which invoke a specific "wombsnake" (*muš-šatur*) are

⁽¹⁰⁾ Sir L. WOOLLEY, *Ur Excavations*, IV. *The Early Periods*, Philadelphia, 1955.

⁽¹¹⁾ S. H. LANGDON, *Tammuz and Ishtar*, Oxford, 1914.

⁽¹²⁾ E. D. VAN BUREN, «Clay Figurines of Babylonia and Assyria», *Yale Oriental Series, Researches*, 16, (*Yale Babylonian Collection*, No. 2240), 1930, p. 248

listed by Heimpel ⁽¹³⁾. Thus the three applied serpents before the stepped throne probably represent the numinous attributes of the goddess.

That miniature shrines of this kind were the appurtenances of a fertility cult is evident from the simple, yet powerfully suggestive votive thrones or chairs found at Lagash, in Babylonia (figs. 6, 7). These are datable to the third dynasty of Ur ⁽¹⁴⁾. The front legs of one of these also serve as the deity's legs. In the other, the artist, by masterly placement of the hands, has utilized the pregnant belly and the entire pubic triangle as if to represent the head and torso, respectively. In both these cases, the ophidian character of the goddess is stressed by zigzags incised within the triangles. These symbols were anticipated even in pre-Sargonid times on a sherd from Lagash (fig. 8) painted with paired sinuous lines to outline the pubes, which is recognizable as such only because the vulva also is painted on it.

That zigzags and sinuous lines were not merely decorative, but meant to recall the fertility goddess's primeval ophidian nature, is proven by numerous images of Ishtar, and of her Canaanite and pre-Israelite counterparts, Astarte or Ashera, and Ashtoreth, respectively. In these, the goddess is portrayed naked and offering her breasts. Serpents engraved on her body, usually one on each leg and thigh, creep toward her pubes.

Such idols occur early in the 3rd millennium, for example at the important temple of Ishtar at Ashur, in Assyria ⁽¹⁵⁾. These images were crudely fashioned in clay, and are eloquent expressions of the devotee's desire to be fertile. In some of them, lines representing a serpent actually touch the pubic triangle (fig. 9). In addition to votive chairs like those from Lagash, pottery found in this temple often bore chevrons incised within bisected triangles. At Nahariyeh, now on Israel's northern coast, Ben-Dor ⁽¹⁶⁾ excavated a remarkable silver idol of Astarte measuring only about 50 mm. in height, from below the lowest floor of a Canaanite temple dedicated to this deity (fig. 10). This location clearly suggests her chthonic, ophidian character, which is further emphasized by the lithe body and the form of the head. In addition, upon careful inspection one can notice a gently wavy ridge over each leg and knee — emblematic serpents creeping toward the genitals.

There are several other idols ⁽¹⁷⁾ in which the association of serpent and pubes is very pronounced. In still others, the deity assumed serpent form fully. One of these specimens even has human breasts and a cup beneath to catch their milk ⁽¹⁸⁾.

All of these examples prepare us for the recognition of pudenda as symbolized by

⁽¹³⁾ W. HEIMPEL, «Tierbilder in der Sumerischen Literatur», *Studia Pobl*, 2, 1968: cf. hymns nos. 87 ff.

⁽¹⁴⁾ H. DE GENOUILLAC, *Fouilles de Telloh*, II, Paris, 1936.

⁽¹⁵⁾ W. ANDRAE, *Die archaischen Ishtar-Tempel*, Leipzig, 1922, pp. 36-38, fig. 5.

⁽¹⁶⁾ I. BEN-DOR, in *QDAP*, 14, 1950, (pp. 1-41), p. 26, pl. XII 5.

⁽¹⁷⁾ W. F. ALBRIGHT, «The Second Campaign

at Tell Beit Mirsim (Kiriath-Sepher)», *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 8, 1928, pp. 1-11; E. GRANT, «Beth Shemesh, 1928», *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 10, 1929, pp. 1-15; C. F. A. SCHAEFFER, *Ugaritica*, II. *Mission de Ras Shamra*, vol. 5, Paris, 1949, fig. 10.

⁽¹⁸⁾ A. ROWE, *The Four Canaanite Temples of Beth Shan*, Part 1, Philadelphia, 1940, pl. 42A, 2, 5, pl. XLIV A, 4.

triangles, and of serpents as zigzags, chevrons and wavy lines in works of art which evoke the goddess of fertility only in subtle ways. A few illustrations will suffice to call attention to the range of specimens in which the symbolism becomes progressively less obvious.

It was customary for devotees at the temple of Ishtar at Ashur, mentioned above, to place before her main image offerings in the form of small terracotta altars in the shape of houses (fig. 11). Most were in two stages, with rectangular doors and triangular windows. They were normally empty, yet pregnant with meaning. Each represented the house of Ishtar, or rather, her brothel, since in her capacity as universal lover and progenitor she was the archetypal harlot. In Assyria and Babylonia she was called *Kilili*, and the epithets *Kilili Musirtu*, 'Kilili who leans [peeps] out' and *Kilili ša apāti*, 'Kilili of the windows' aptly call attention to the characteristic stations used by her profession for enticing men passing by and filling them with lust. Thus the triangular windows are hardly coincidental; and the applied serpents winding about them, as also Ishtar's other emblem signifying love — tiny doves affixed to the eaves — complete the symbolism.

Such a terracotta house is also known from Palestine (Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem, Acc. no. P. 1804) but its windows are not triangular. It is thought by some to be an "incense burner". However, a figurine of a woman is seated in one of its window, her thighs spread out to exhibit her genitals. There is a serpent in attendance, and remnants of the forefeet of a goat and the head of a lioness in relief — Astarte's other emblems — enhance the homology with Kilili's house.

Garstang ⁽¹⁹⁾ describing his extensive, carefully catalogued finds at Jericho, stated that « the snake is the only cult emblem appearing among Middle Bronze Age [c. 1700 B.C.] deposits ». This assertion is a commentary on how even an experienced and perceptive archaeologist is liable to overlook the emblematic triangle occurring on the same objects. For, by the Middle Bronze Age this motif had become so common on painted pottery that it is easy to see how it might strike one as only an embellishment, especially when it occurs in clusters or is inverted. History attests that the cult of Astarte or Ashtaroth was still firmly entrenched in Palestine. Both of her fertility symbols appear in profusion on the pottery from the palace store-rooms at Jericho (figs. 12, 13, 14). Naturalistic models of serpents occur on jugs and their handles during the Early and Middle Bronze Ages; but, according to Garstang, by the Late Bronze Age, c. 1500 B.C., these serpent effigies gave way « in the course of time [to] a wavy line between two straight lines which presumably represents its hole or cage ». Epstein ⁽²⁰⁾, describing Palestinian pottery of the 16th century B.C., does not discuss symbolism yet goes so far as to regard as unlikely that even wavy lines were originally intended to represent any specific object. But this is an extreme view and it is disproved by innumerable works of art about a millennium older, for example by the sherd in fig. 8 and the terracotta thrones and shrine in figs. 5, 6

⁽¹⁹⁾ J. GARSTANG, « Jericho: City and Necropolis », *Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology*, XXI, 1934, pp. 99-136.

⁽²⁰⁾ C. EPSTEIN, *Palestinian Bichrome Ware*, Leiden, 1966.

and 7. Droop ⁽²¹⁾ noted that the sinuous lines, chevrons and triangles of Bronze Age pottery from Jericho are anticipated earlier in the neolithic period. The high frequency of such stylized decorations on Palestinian ware can be appreciated in the documentation by Amiran ⁽²²⁾. A simple, but symbolically forceful, painted, Canaanite jug of this kind found in the royal tombs of the First Dynasty of Egypt, c. 2900 B.C. ⁽²³⁾ is shown in fig. 15.

The cultural ties between Mesopotamia and the western Iranian regions of Luristan and Elam were as continuous and ancient as were Mesopotamia's links with her Semitic neighbours in Palestine and Syria. The western Iranians shared with the Mesopotamians certain features of early religious development, and these are reflected in the many similarities in works of art of the protohistoric and later periods. Mother-goddess figurines ⁽²⁴⁾ were common, and cult-practices involving serpents were pronounced ⁽²⁵⁾. I have submitted for publication elsewhere a discussion of specific historical and archaeological facets of the early religions of these contiguous regions.

The glyptic art and painted pottery of Elam are a rich, varied source of geometric motifs and of animal representations, principally caprids, cervids, birds and serpents. Though these were on occasion treated naturalistically, the decorative patterns shown in figs. 16 to 20 speak for themselves. They are taken from the extensive description of the serpent motif in Elam by Toscanne ⁽²⁶⁾ who, however, does not comment upon the symbolic implication of the triangle. Fig. 17 is an obvious variation of the pattern already encountered in Lagash and in Jericho. In fig. 19 three opposed pairs of serpents placed concentrically in "kissing" attitudes as a group come so close to suggesting the vagina that one might well suspect this was the artist's intent. That these decorative patterns and their countless variations were originally inspired by religion is clear from relics of apparently cultic significance. I shall cite two such.

Fig. 21, taken from Mecquenem ⁽²⁷⁾, represents a small archaic button-seal « en pierre tendre », possibly steatite, excavated at Tepe Cheshme Ali, just outside Tehran. A similar one is also known from Susa ⁽²⁸⁾. Deeply incised undulations and triangles mark its surface. The boss on the reverse side bears a hole from which a clay effigy of a ram was suspended. Fig. 22 shows an impression of one side of an archaic stamp seal, c. 4th

⁽²¹⁾ J. P. DROOP, « Jericho: City and Necropolis, VIII. Pottery of the Chalcolithic and Neolithic Levels », *Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology*, XXII, 1935, pp. 169-73.

⁽²²⁾ R. AMIRAN, *Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land*, Rutgers, New Jersey, 1970.

⁽²³⁾ H. BONNET, *Ein frühgeschichtliches Gräberfeld bei Abusir*, Leipzig, 1928.

⁽²⁴⁾ PH. ACKERMAN, « Cult figurines », in A. U. POPE, ed., *A Survey of Persian Art*, Oxford, vol. I.

⁽²⁵⁾ P. AMIET, *Elam*, Paris, 1966; W. HINZ, *The Lost World of Elam*, London, 1972; P.

TOSCANNE, « Études sur le serpent: figure et symbole dans l'antiquité Élamite », *Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse*, s. 4, Paris, 1911, pp. 153-228.

⁽²⁶⁾ TOSCANNE, *loc. cit.*

⁽²⁷⁾ R. DE MECQUENEM, « Notes sur la céramique peinte archaïque en Perse », *Mémoires de la Mission Archéologique de Perse*, 20, Paris, 1928, pp. 99-132.

⁽²⁸⁾ M. PEZARD, « Études sur les intailles Suseennes », *Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse*, 12, Paris, 1911, pl. 1, fig. 149.

millennium B.C., from Luristan, whose intimate and early cultural links with Susa, in Elam, are reflected in art. It portrays the façade of a shrine, or house. Clearly, the zigzag and triangles above the portals are not only analogous to the design on the button seals, they also do not fail to recall the serpents and the triangular windows of Ishtar's (Kilili's) votive houses from a later epoch in Assyria. The reverse side of the Luristan stamp-seal bears a human figure with the head of a mountain-goat, or other caprid. This personage is quite commonly represented on seals (of a type also found at Tell Asmar in central Mesopotamia) accompanied by naturalistically depicted serpents ⁽²⁹⁾ and is believed to be a primitive divinity comparable with divinities with caprine associations from a later epoch in Iran ⁽³⁰⁾. However, as I have elaborated elsewhere ⁽³¹⁾, the primeval antecedents of this goat-headed deity may well have been totemic animals or fully theriomorphic caprid-deities of either sex; whether these were the precursors of the Sumerian Innana and her consort Dumuzi (the Assyrio-Babylonian Ishtar and Tammuz) cannot be proven. But it is highly pertinent that these Mesopotamian divinities were not only intimately involved in rites of fertility and regeneration but also possessed both ophidian and caprine aspects, as the liturgies translated by Langdon ⁽³²⁾ and Jacobsen ⁽³³⁾ clearly indicate.

Fig. 23 shows a terracotta fertility bed viewed from above. It is from Susa, and dated to the 2nd millennium B.C. Other beds show a copulating couple. These objects, measuring no more than about fifteen centimetres by seven, are votive gifts importuning the fertility goddess for her favours. Whether the naked occupant of the bed is the goddess or the devotee is not clear. Her submissive posture and the engraved pubic triangle advertise concupiscence plainly, but the zigzags incised on the bed need more thoughtful interpretation. They may at first be taken to represent woven rushes used as webbing; and this may be so. Yet, because symbols played so dominant a role in ancient beliefs, and considering the innumerable archaeological relics connected with the cult of fertility where zigzags have obvious connotations of the serpent, I am inclined to regard the present instance as no exception. Indeed, a stamp seal from Tepe Gawra, of the early Uruk period, c. 3400 B.C. ⁽³⁴⁾ depicts a couple in sexual embrace on a small bed or couch under which a huge serpent is seen emerging.

To conclude this section I have selected an intriguing example from northern Mesopotamia. An amulet or stamp-seal of c. 2900 B.C., from Tell Brak ⁽³⁵⁾, bears on one face three rows of three inset triangles, probably intended to take inlay; the other face is engraved with what appear to be representations of human footprints (a deity's?) which point

⁽²⁹⁾ P. AMIET, « Quelques aspects peu connus de l'art iranien », *Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France*, 4-5, 1973, pp. 215-24.

⁽³⁰⁾ R. D. BARNETT, « Homme masqué ou dieu-ibex? », *Syria*, XLIII, 1966, pp. 259-76; E. PORADA, *The Art of Ancient Iran*, New York, 1965.

⁽³¹⁾ B. MUNDKUR, « Bull versus Serpent: Glimpses of Three Ancient Civilizations » (to be

published).

⁽³²⁾ LANGDON, *op. cit.*

⁽³³⁾ T. JACOBSEN, *Toward the Image of Tammuz* (W. L. MORAN, ed.), Cambridge, Mass., 1970.

⁽³⁴⁾ A. J. TOBLER, *Excavations at Tepe Gawra*, vol. 2, Philadelphia, 1950, pl. CLXIII 87.

⁽³⁵⁾ M. E. L. MALLOWAN, « Excavations at Brak and Chagar Bazar », *Iraq*, IX, 1947, (pp. 1-259), p. 122, pl. XVIII a.

in opposite directions; coursing between these is the neatly engraved figure of a serpent. The meaning of these patterns is not clear, but they recall certain north African rupestal engravings to be discussed below which also include footprints and a serpent-like design.

II. THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

The artistic treatment of the symbols of fertility in the relatively isolated maritime regions of the Mediterranean has complex origins and is distinct from that of the Near East. There are no religious texts comparable in age, clarity and abundance with those of Mesopotamia and its cultural dependencies to enable more than a superficial characterization of the earliest icons, or deities, of a developing pantheon. Nude figurines are not known in which an overt pubic triangle is linked with the serpent; and it is generally much harder to deduce the meaning of the symbols one encounters.

These are problems whose answers depend finally on knowledge of the spread of the earliest primitive societies across the sea, their insular religious evolution, and the diffusion of their crafts once these societies differentiated to higher levels.

Migrations, chronologies and culture sequences enter in a manner too complex for discussion in an article concerned primarily with the significance of certain symbols linking archaeology with a phase of man's social evolution. The reader should refer to detailed treatments of the archaeological background by Renfrew ⁽³⁶⁾ and Brice ⁽³⁷⁾ among others. Suffice it to state now that Anatolian, Syro-Cilician, and north African culture elements have variously been invoked in explaining the material products of the Aegean cultures.

The cult of Kilili, or Ishtar the harlot, is believed by some to have spread westwards from Mesopotamia, via Syria and Phoenicia, to Cyprus. Here, as Aphrodite Parakypousa or Aphrodite Porne, she personified fertility in her role of patroness of lewd love. However, one must remember that Phoenician penetration of Cyprus occurred not much earlier than 800 B.C. Proponents of the view that Aphrodite's presence in Cyprus antedates the Phoenicians' point to the many Anatolian rather than Semitic features of her cult. In any case, crude, votive, terracotta naked goddesses of the kind shown in fig. 24 are known in large numbers from Enkomi, eastern Cyprus ⁽³⁸⁾. It is improbable that they are local versions of the Phoenician, Canaanite or Mesopotamian models, for they are dated to late Cypriot III, 1220-1100 B.C. Neither relief nor incised sinuosities representing serpents occur on these Cypriot goddesses. Their pubic triangles are extraordinarily large and are as a rule incised by chevrons or herringbones.

These incised motifs are sometimes described as "pubic hairs", but there are strong

⁽³⁶⁾ C. RENFREW, *The Emergence of Civilization [The Cyclades and the Aegean in the Third Millennium B.C.]*, London, 1972.

⁽³⁷⁾ W. C. BRICE, « The Anthropological and Epigraphic Evidence for Culture Contact in the Early Aegean », *Acta, 2nd International Collo-*

quium on Aegean Prehistory, Athens, 1972, p. 15-17.

⁽³⁸⁾ A. CAUBET, « Terre cuites chypriotes inédites ou peu connues de l'âge du bronze au Louvre », *Report, Dept. of Antiquities, Cyprus*, 1971, pp. 7-12.

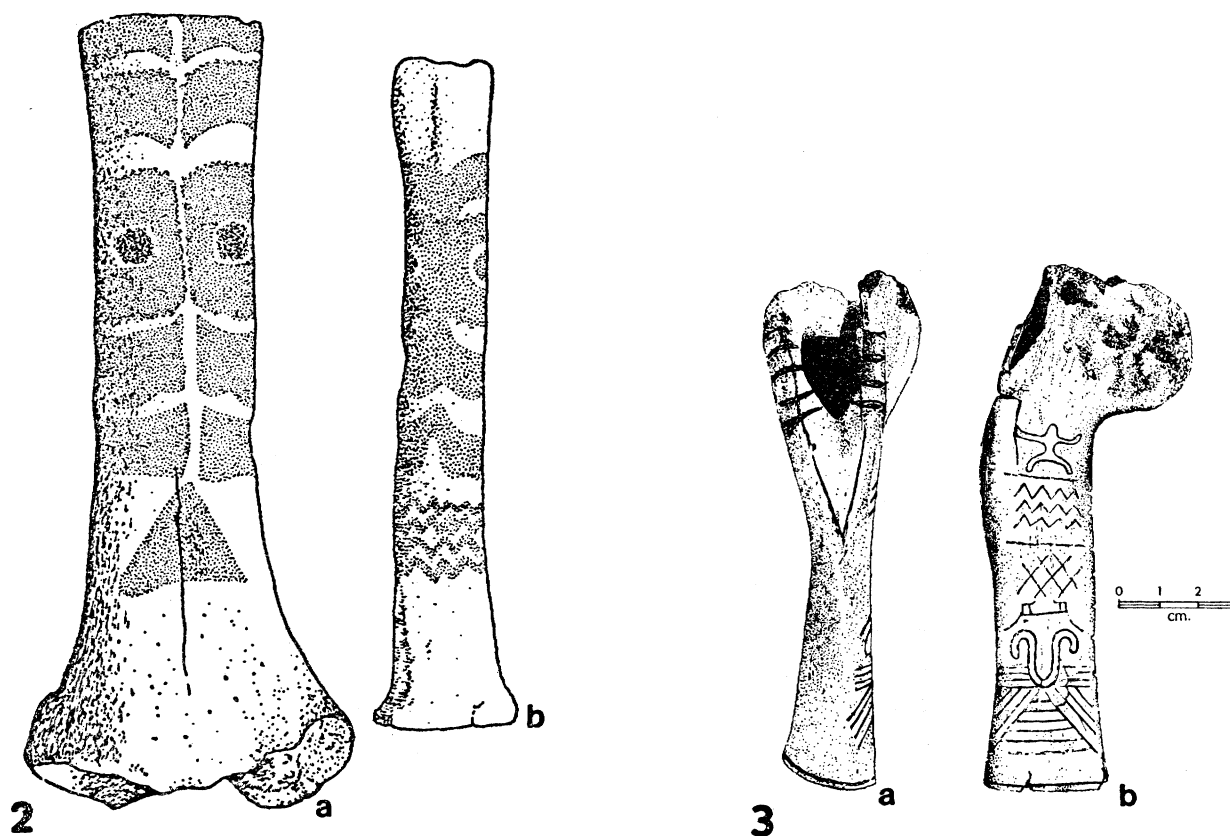
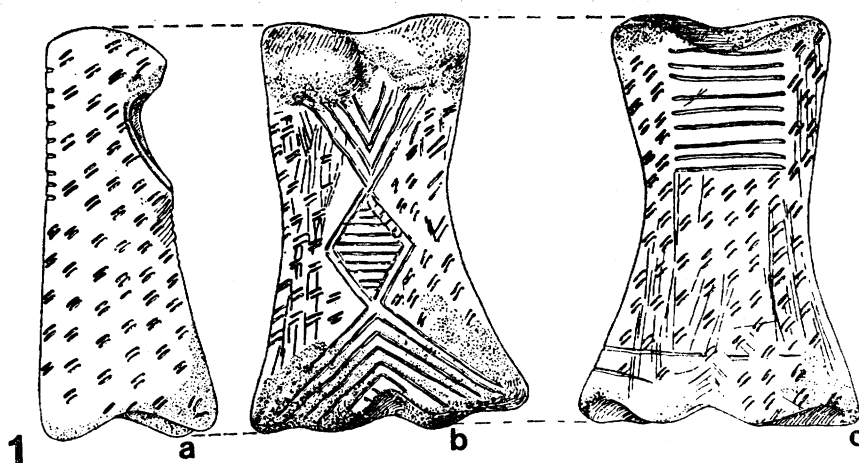


Fig. 1 - Incised phalanx of a horse. Danubian Epipalaeolithic, c. 8700 years B.P. Fig. 2 - Ochre-painted human bones, Late Eneolithic. Southern Spain. Fig. 3 - Incised human bone. Neolithic period, Northern Italy.

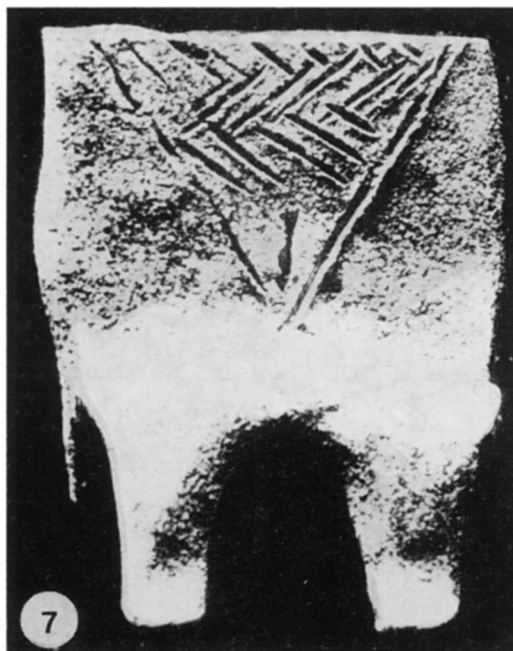


Fig. 4 - Ophidian idol, suckling an infant. Sumerian, *c.* 4200 B.C. Terracotta. Fig. 5 - Votive shrine. Babylonian, *c.* 2700 B.C. Terracotta. Figs. 6, 7 - Votive thrones representing the seated goddess of fertility. Third Dynasty of Ur. Terracotta.

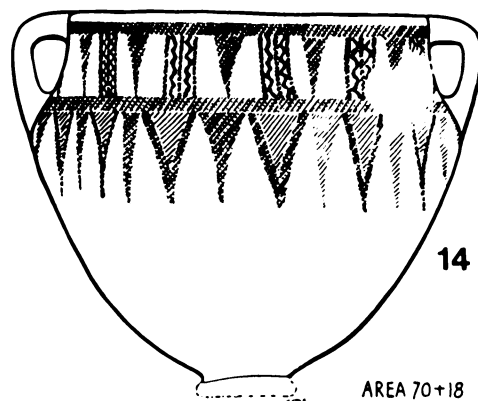
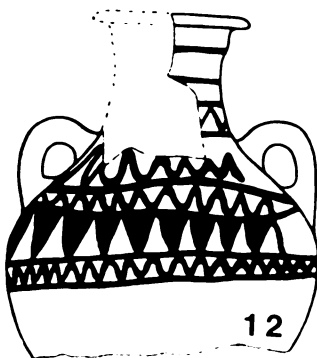
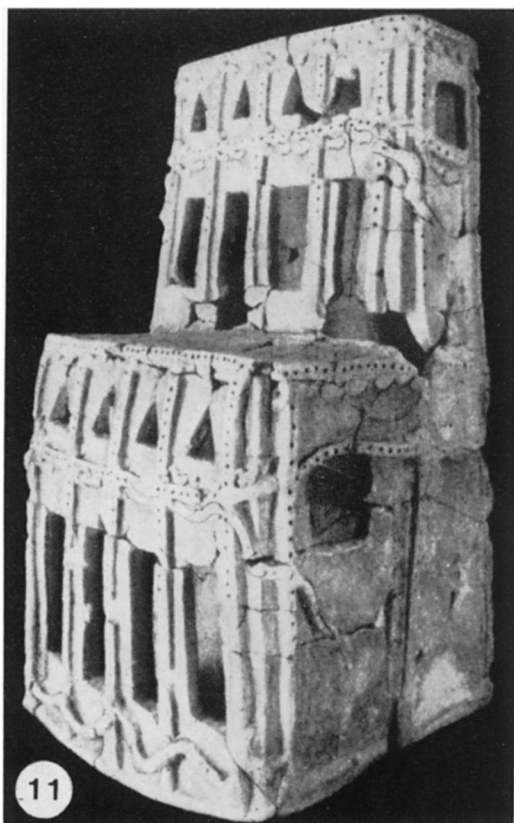
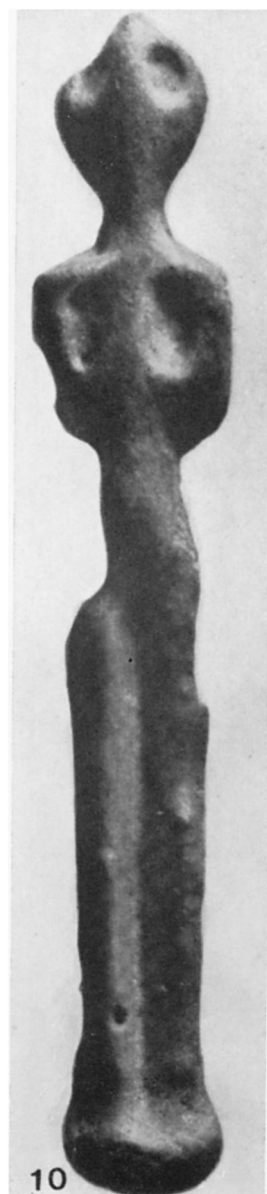
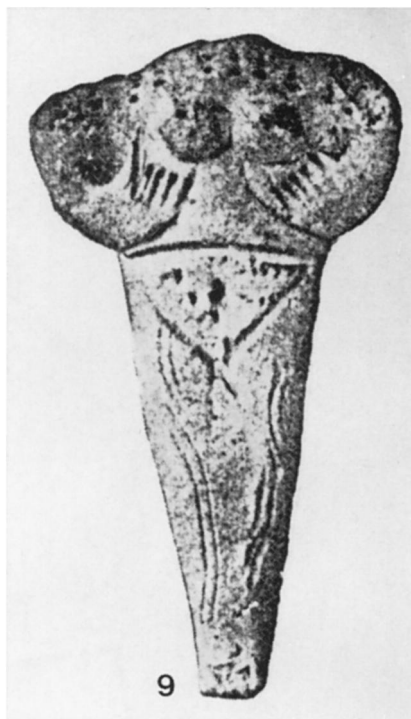


Fig. 8 - Painted sherd. Third Dynasty of Ur. Fig. 9 - Terracotta idol. Temple of Ishtar, Ashur, Assyria, c. 2800 B.C. Fig. 10 - Silver figurine of Ashtoreth. Nahariyeh, Israel. Middle Bronze Age. Fig. 11 - Votive house. Temple of Ishtar at Ashur, c. 2800 B.C. Figs. 12-14 - Painted pots. Palace store-rooms at Jericho, c. 1700 B.C.

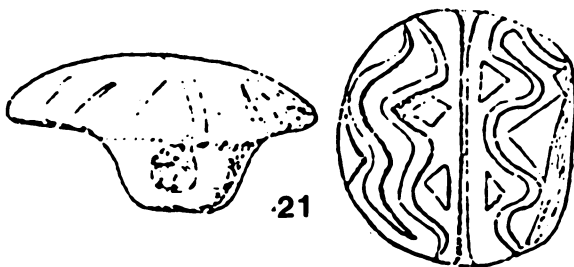
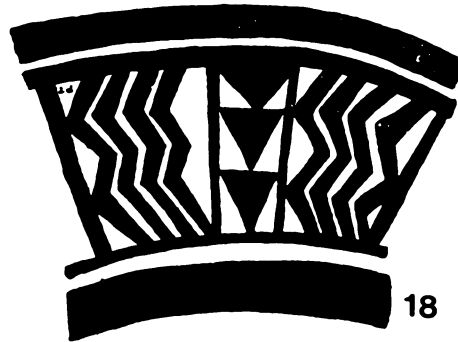
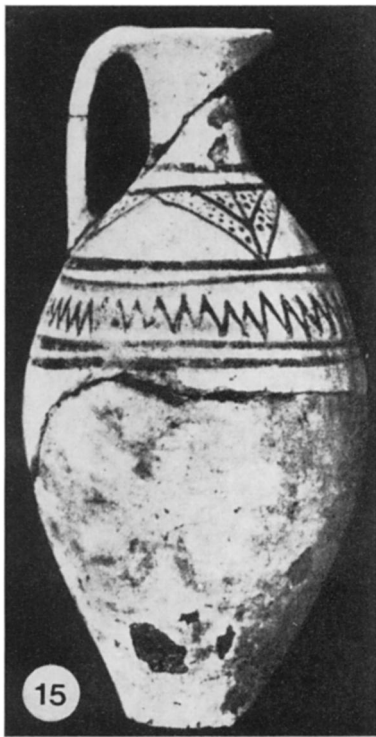


Fig. 15 - Painted jug. Canaanite, *c.* 2900 B.C. Figs. 16-20 - Painted designs on Elamite pottery. Fig. 21 - Archaic button-seal. Northern Iran.



Fig. 22 - Stamp seal. Luristan, Western Iran, *c.* 4th millennium B.C. Fig. 23 - Fertility bed. Susa, Elam, 2nd millennium B.C. Fig. 24 - Idol from Enkomi, Cyprus, *c.* 1200 B.C.



Fig. 25 - Neolithic stone bowl. Khirokitia, Cyprus, *c.* 5800-5250 B.C.
 Fig. 26 - Composite mortuary vessel. Vounous, Cyprus, mid-2nd millennium B.C.

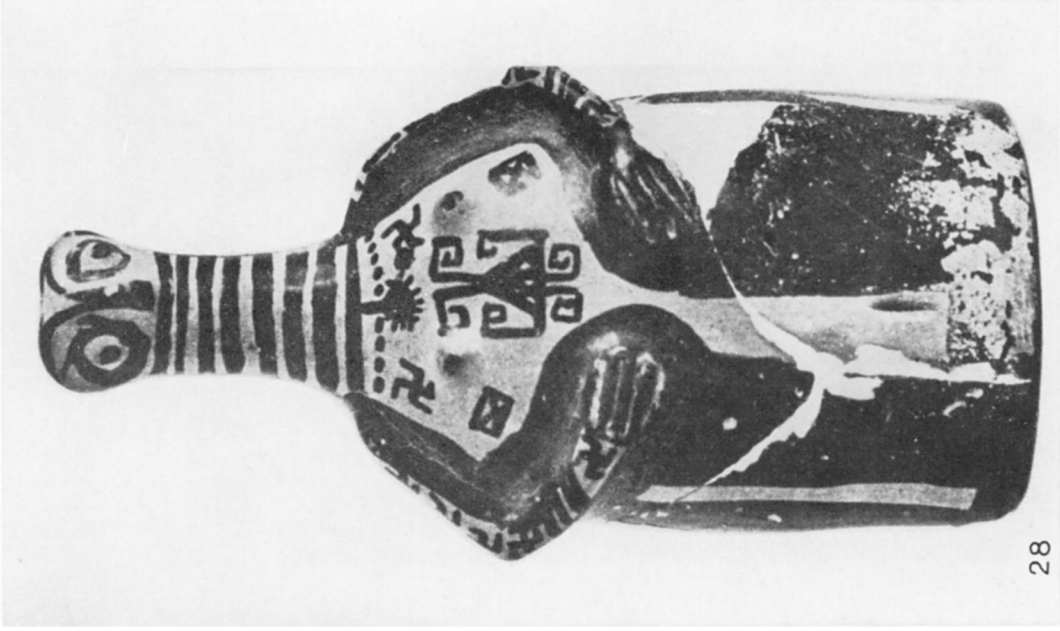
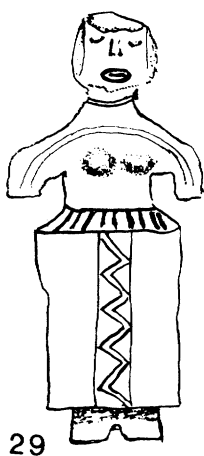


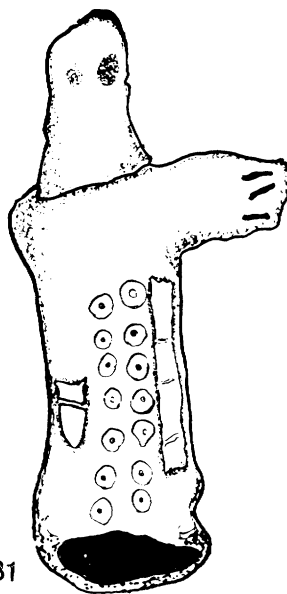
Fig. 27 - Idol from Southern Anatolia, c. 5000 (?) B.C. Painted ceramic. Fig. 28 - Idol from Kos, Dodecanese, 8th century B.C. Painted ceramic.



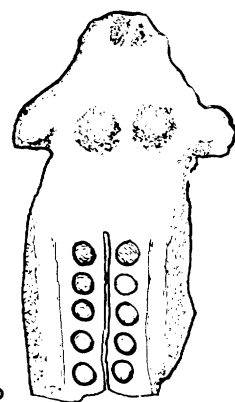
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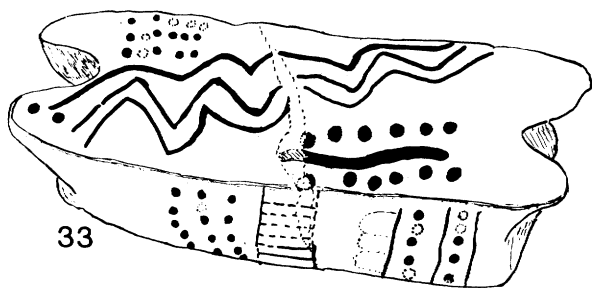
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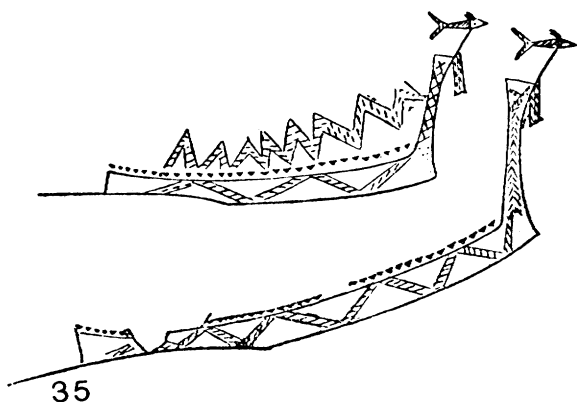
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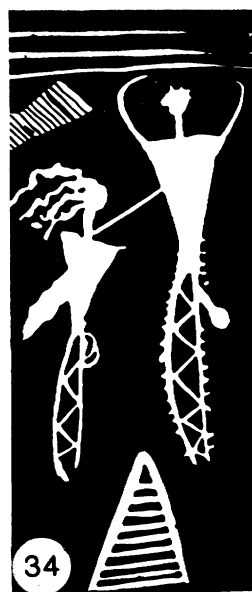
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Figs. 29-32 - Cretan terracotta images. Early Minoan or earlier. Fig. 33 - Small clay object with incised patterns. Neolithic Crete. Fig. 34 - Slip decoration on Amratian vase. Southern Egypt. Fig. 35 - Ship motifs incised on Cycladic "frying pans".

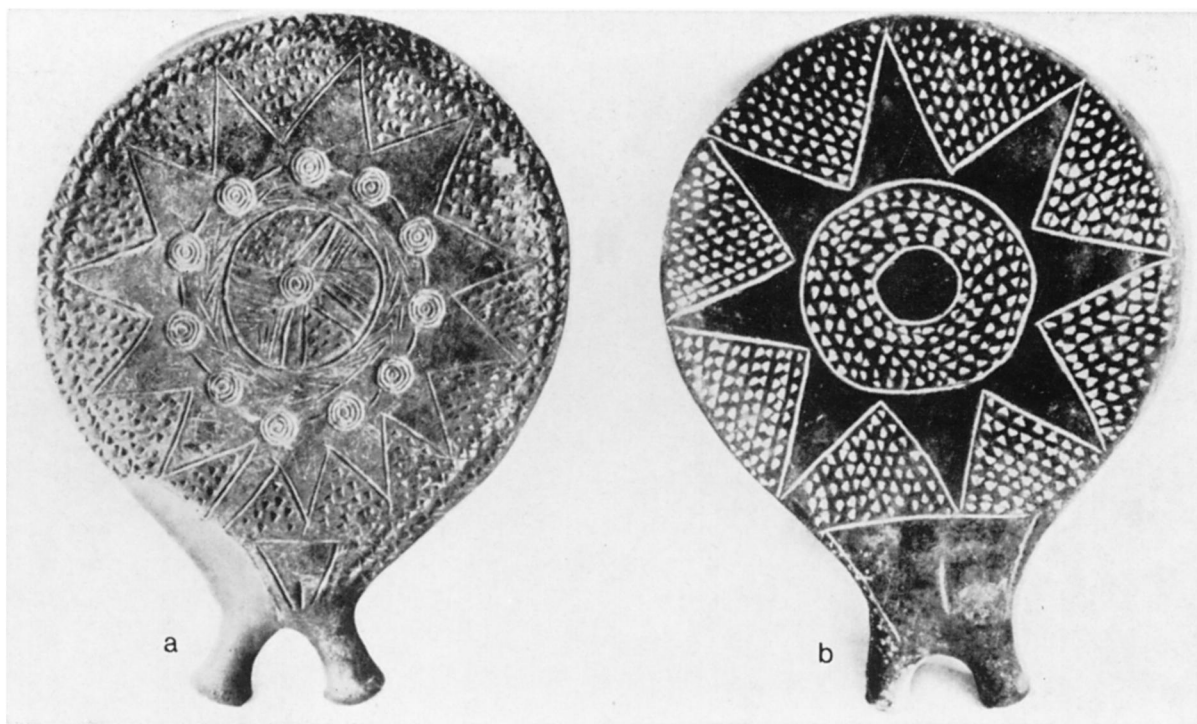


Fig. 36 - Cycladic "frying pans". Terracotta. Fig. 37 - Stone stele from Souphli, Thessaly. Neolithic Greece.
 Fig. 38 - Statue-menhir. Mas Capelier, Southern France. Megalithic period.

evidences of a serpent cult in Cyprus and similar markings occur much earlier on pottery with definite neolithic characteristics ⁽³⁹⁾. A jug of red polished ware from Vounous, like many others from this site, is decorated with serpents in relief flanked by incised herring-bones ⁽⁴⁰⁾. In addition, pyxides of red polished clay are known ⁽⁴¹⁾ which I suspect were ritual containers for snakes, unlike the type of "snake house" described by Karageorghis ⁽⁴²⁾. These pyxides have lids with clear connotations of the fertility cult. One is decorated in relief with figures of a sleeping man and woman in embrace. Chevrons are incised on their necks and on the woman's forehead. A bird in the round is affixed at each corner of the "bed". In another pyxis (Cyprus Museum, No. VT 2/91) the lid bears a large central zigzag, at one end of which stands the figure of a man and at the other of a woman holding an infant. Still another lid is flanked by birds in the round. It is incised with two long rows of stacked chevrons, five parallel zigzag lines and dashed parallel lines.

That the serpent, like the bull, figured very prominently in the fertility rites of pre-historic Cyprus is traceable at least to the Early Bronze Age, c. 2800 B.C. The use of chevrons on pottery continued up to about the 8th century B.C. But whether the origins of ophiolatriy were indigenous or should be ascribed to migrations prior to the Early Bronze Age, perhaps from the Asian mainland, we do not know. Neither serpents nor bulls, caprids, cervids or other animals are naturalistically depicted on the Neolithic I (5250-4750 B.C.) pottery of Cyprus. Groups of wavy incisions occur quite frequently on the "combed ware" of Neolithic II (3500-3200 B.C.). It is difficult to establish their symbolic correspondence to serpents.

The finds at Khirokitia, one of the neolithic sites illustrating the earliest stages of human activity in Cyprus, now dated to 5800-5250 B.C., include two mortuary objects of interest. Both are of stone. Judging from the craftsmanship bestowed on them, they appear to be cultic vessels. One is a tray ⁽⁴³⁾ with five parallel zigzags engraved across its face. As we shall see later, there are several instances from the Mediterranean area where the number five seems to have a mystical value and is sometimes involved in relics which depict serpents. The other (fig. 25) is a square, spouted bowl with a cruciform pattern of raised points on the side and edges. However, its distinguishing decor comprises groups of five chevrons carved in relief on either side of a triangular spout. It is tempting to regard these as the joint symbols of our theme, but this should be resisted in the present case, which is exceptional, until more direct evidence is yielded by other early neolithic finds.

⁽³⁹⁾ P. DIKAIOS, «The Excavations at Vounous-Bellapais in Cyprus, 1931-1932», *Archaeologia*, 88, 1940, pp. 1-174, pl. XXXV a; E. SJÖQVIST, «Die Kultgeschichte eines Cyprischen Temenos», *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, 30, 1932, pp. 308 ff.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ E. STEWART, J. STEWART, *Vounous 1937-38. Field Report on the Excavations Sponsored by the British School of Archaeology of Athens*,

Lund, 1950, pl. LIII a

⁽⁴¹⁾ DIKAIOS, *loc. cit.*

⁽⁴²⁾ V. KARAGEORGHIS, «A "Snake House" from Enkomi», *Report, Dep. of Antiquities, Cyprus*, 1972, pp. 109-12.

⁽⁴³⁾ P. DIKAIOS, *Khirokitia [Final Report on the Excavations of a Neolithic Settlement in Cyprus, 1936-1946]*, Oxford, 1953, pl. LXII 1.

For clearer suggestions of serpents linked with the mother-goddesses of Cyprus, we must turn to Vounous for its red polished pottery, which abounds in relief-figures of serpents, and to a special type of composite vessel found in the elaborate *tholoi* of Early Cypriot II and III (2500-2100 B.C.).

In one such group-burial, bodies of twenty-five infants were located on successive floors in small holes covered with stone slabs. On an upper level, a clay head, perhaps a deity's, bore a serpent-design on its back.

The composite vessels consist of four hemispherical bowls adhering by their edges, the front right bowl often having sinuosities, stacked chevrons or zigzag incisions. Rising vertically from the centre of the grouped bowls, and similarly ornamented, is a thin rectangular plaque of varied form. Some are simple with no applied reliefs, others have snake-like appliques or a miniature jug at the top. Almost all plaques have two, sometimes three, prominent oval openings. In the specimen in fig. 26, the armless human figure with its long neck may or may not be ophidian in nature but, as if to denote childbirth, a pair of limbs in relief emerges from above the upper opening. Thus the latter probably represents the vagina, no more bizarre in its location than in the specimens shown in figs. 1-3. The lower opening defines the legs. In another composite vessel, there are diminutive arms holding an infant near the upper opening but the infant's body is separate from the limbs, which emerge from the opening exactly as in fig. 26. The idea of rebirth could not have been conveyed more plainly by these composite, mortuary vessels. If, as seems plausible, they bear witness to the primitive notion of the serpent's involvement in rebirth, vessels of this type must have served as feeders, with the openings and the plaques meant to be sanctuaries for the twisting reptile like the "snake-tubes" and perforated vessels of Crete and Greece.

Passing westwards from Cyprus we need pause only briefly just five kilometres off the southwest Anatolian coast at the island of Kos, which, like the nearby Rhodos, was a maritime waystation for the Achaean Greeks who colonized Cyprus in the Late Bronze Age. The circular alabaster idols with long necks and prominent pudenda, of the late 3rd millennium, from Kültepe in central Anatolia ⁽⁴⁴⁾ are well-known. Yet in none of these can the connection between serpents and human fertility be deduced more vividly than in certain prehistoric Anatolian ceramic idols of another type.

One such specimen (fig. 27) should be compared with a ceramic idol from Kos (fig. 28). The latter was excavated from a tomb for children and is dated to the 8th century B.C. ⁽⁴⁵⁾. That it portrays a pregnant female as part human and part serpent is a reasonable premise consistent with the deeply rooted veneration, throughout the Aegean world, of ophidian deities and of serpents as the harbingers of new life ⁽⁴⁶⁾. In addition, the emblems

⁽⁴⁴⁾ N. ÖZGÜÇ, « Marble Idols and Statuettes from the Excavations at Kültepe », *Bell*, 21, 1957, pp. 71-80.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ L. MORRICONE, « Scavi e ricerche a Co (1935-1943) », *Bollettino d'Arte*, XXXV, 1950,

p. 320.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ HARRISON, *op. cit.*, pp. 269 ff.; M. P. NILSSON, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Religion*, Lund, 1950.

painted on the distended bellies of the Kos and Anatolian idols are basically alike and, together with other features, bespeak a continual stylistic influence from the Anatolian peninsula. The emblem on the Kos idol can hardly tax one's imagination. It is that of an infant, whose body is triangular. Its arms and legs are recognizable enough but, like the processes at the apex, even they carry suggestions of a serpent's bifid tongue. In describing the Anatolian specimen, Parrot (⁴⁷), despite the symbolic infant marked on its belly, the pubes represented by a chevron beneath it, and the zigzags, summed up too cautiously: « Le visage n'est, en aucune façon, celui d'une femme, mais d'un animal bien difficile à identifier... Cet être étrange se dérobe à toute explication ». Its comparison with the idol from Kos should reduce doubts as to what the artist intended to deify.

The bare-breasted "snake-goddesses" of Crete are famous. These faience figurines of the Palatial, Middle Minoan III period with their colourful flounced skirts, headgear, ample bosoms and serpents twisting about their arms and torsos have popularized awareness of the cult more effectively than any other Cretan relic. Totemistic aspects of the goddess's evolution are considered by Willets (⁴⁸), and Branigan (⁴⁹) has discussed a few disparate religious appurtenances of the Early Minoan period which eventually were absorbed into a single cult with the serpent as its dominant symbol. This dominance, and the characteristic exposure of the goddess's breasts contrasting with her otherwise elaborately concealed nudity, culminated a long development going back to the neolithic, from the naked figurines of which period she cannot be dissociated.

There is hardly a naked figurine from neolithic Crete in which the pubic region is as clearly delimited as in the cases described above, or which has a serpent in intimate association with it. For the closest Cretan parallel to the Mesopotamian or Canaanite images of the latter kind, one should turn to a small, neolithic, three-sided prism bead from Kalochorio discussed by Kenna (⁵⁰). One face of it shows a human figure with outstretched arms and legs. On either side is a winding serpent, its head directed towards the groins or hips. But one cannot be certain whether this personage is male or female. In another neolithic specimen (⁵¹) a small figurine with stubby outstretched arms, presumably a female deity, a symbolic serpent is emblazoned across the chest, not the pubes. The symbol is a five-fold zigzag of two parallel lines which widen at one end and terminate in short indents as if to suggest a serpent's gaping mouth and fangs.

On the other hand, there are innumerable crudely made terracotta figurines of females of a type not considered by Branigan. They occur in Crete and elsewhere in the Aegean over an extended period beginning with the Late Neolithic and especially Early Minoan I. They have sinuous lines, zigzags or intertwined meanders incised or painted

(⁴⁷) A. PARROT, « Figurines et céramiques anatoliennes », *Syria*, XLVI, 1969, pp. 45-56.

(⁴⁸) R. F. WILLETS, *Cretan Cults and Festivals*, London, 1962.

(⁴⁹) K. BRANIGAN, « The Genesis of the Household Goddess », *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici*,

8, 1969, pp. 28-38.

(⁵⁰) V. E. G. KENNA, *Cretan Seals, with a catalogue of the Minoan gems in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford, 1960, fig. 30.

(⁵¹) ZERVOS, *loc. cit.*, pl. 56.

on them. These markings usually rise vertically over the front part of full-length skirts from foot-level to the level of the pubes. Thus, they are reminiscent of a symbolism already encountered in the idols of Ishtar and Astarte. It must be admitted, however, that while more evidence than this is needed to prove a derivation from Mesopotamia or the Levant, an ideological equivalence with the symbolism of these regions seems not unlikely since survivals of the anthropologically primitive notion that women can be fertilized by serpents are equally well-entrenched in Aegean mythology: Alexander of Macedonia was fathered by a serpent; and Zeus, whose origins are Cretan, assumed the form of a serpent for intercourse with Kore, his daughter by his own mother ⁽⁵²⁾.

A specimen with a zigzag on the skirt (fig. 29) was found at Inatos in the sacred cave of the goddess Eileithyia, protectress of childbirth, amidst clay models of ships, double axes and couples in erotic postures. In another (Iraklion Museum, No. 13196, case 149) from the same cave, a figurine in black-painted, buff pottery, now damaged, has an infant feeding at the breast and a pair of intertwined meanders rise upward to the level of the pubes. In an anthropomorphic vase from Koumasa a serpent is coiled around the neck and a pair of intertwined zigzags ascend towards the breasts ⁽⁵³⁾. A Mycenaean figurine of a woman offering her breast, found amid two complete effigies of coiled serpents and fragments of at least four more, is illustrated by Ervin ⁽⁵⁴⁾. Intertwined, meandering lines decorate the front of her robe. In an archaic, Boeotian cult vessel, sinuous bands are painted vertically on the fronts of the skirts of Hera, goddess of maternity and conjugal love ⁽⁵⁵⁾.

In most cases, the embellishments rise no higher than the level of the crotch and are not mere decorative representations of laced-up skirt fronts. Ceremonial skirts, at least those worn by Cretan priestesses, were slit in the back or partway up on either side, but not in the front, and surviving costumes continue the ancient traditions ⁽⁵⁶⁾. Thus, in the context of Aegean ophiolatry, such zigzags, meanders and sinuosities must represent the serpent. This view is fortified by the depiction of an open-mouthed, naturalistic serpent on an unpublished Cretan image in black-painted, buff pottery (fig. 30). The serpent's pubic association, if one may envisage such in this idol, is only subtly manifest, and its orientation seems to symbolize not the phallus, but birth itself; or, as the Greeks of a later epoch believed, rebirth of a dead hero in the form of a serpent.

Another symbol sometimes seen on archaic Cretan terracottas has heretofore been neglected. It consists of a series of miniature cupmarks, and is as intriguing as it is hard to interpret. A hollow, cylindrical figurine of the Protogeometric phase, from Anavalokhos (fig. 31) has a noseless, mouthless face with pellet-eyes, of which the right one is missing.

⁽⁵²⁾ A. B. COOK, *Zeus. A Study in Ancient Religion*, 2 vols., New York, 1964-65, vol. I, p. 394.

⁽⁵³⁾ ZERVOS, *op. cit.*, pl. 222.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ M. ERVIN, «Newsletter from Greece», *AJA*, 73, 1969, pp. 341-57, pl. 88, fig. 22.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ E. SIMON, «Hera und die Nymphen. Ein Bötischer Polos in Stockholm», *RA*, 1972, II, (pp. 205-20), p. 209, fig. 6.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ J. L. MYRES, «Minoan dress», *Man*, 50, 1950, pp. 1-6; A. C. VAUGHAN, *The House of the Double Axe*, New York, 1959, pp. 125-26.

It is only about 8 cm. in height. The head is shaped as if a cloth hood covers it up to the shoulders. The left arm is stubby and outstretched, the right arm is broken. Two vertical rows of seven cupmarks, each with a central pin-prick, are engraved in front and on each side. The idol probably represents a female with pellet-bosses for breasts, now detached, for there is faint indication of this on the proper left side. A flat, notched strip of clay, now broken, is appliqued to the torso and may once have passed over the shoulders. The unbroken end tapers, giving the impression that it represents a serpent's head. The cultic character of the figurine comes through strongly.

A second type of cupmark symbol found in Crete occurs on an archaic, damaged terracotta measuring about seven centimetres in height (fig. 32). The body is solid, roughly rectangular and represents a female. A straight narrow groove is incised from foot level to the level of the pubes; five shallow cupmarks are aligned on each side of the groove. This symbol also occurs on a very tiny, clay object of the neolithic period (fig. 33). The sketch combines features seen in a photograph by Zervos ⁽⁵⁷⁾ of the unrestored object with features observed by the author after its restoration. Evans ⁽⁵⁸⁾ regarded it as a spool for winding thread, but the numerological overtones of the markings on its surface betray a cultic significance. The symbol in question is on the upper surface and has six pairs of "cupmarks" filled with white paste. Diagonally from it is a group of five tiny circular marks in each of five rows (Zervos' photograph shows only three rows). A sinuous line with two "eyes", and a broad zigzag also mark the upper surface. Two groups of incised circlets occur on one of its sides. Each group has five circlets in each of three rows. There are two five-fold zigzags incised on the lower surface. The symbol common to the upper surface of this object and to the one in fig. 32 has a counterpart outside Crete: It occurs on the neck of a Late Mycenaean terracotta bull ⁽⁵⁹⁾ and consists of five pairs of circular, painted spots separated by a line.

Such symbols, typified by a painted line or groove which separates pairs of circular spots or cup-marks, have a parallel in Libya, and this may be of interest to proponents of north African contacts with Crete during pre-Minoan times. At Udei El Chel in Tripolitania, where "erotic" female figures are inscribed around natural, pudenda-like depressions in rock surfaces, there is a large, rocky outcrop which probably was used in primitive rituals ⁽⁶⁰⁾. Its surface has a slightly wavy, narrow groove about three metres long. It is mainly a natural fissure, which terminates at one end in a man-made, oval cupmark and continues on the other side of this cupmark as a short taper. Aligned on either side of the fissure is a row of five circular or oval cupmarks scooped in the rock. There is also a cluster of five (?) spots engraved within a circle close by. Footprint patterns, of which at least one pair is pointed in opposite directions, are also engraved in the rock. If the symbols on the terracottas described above are at all cultic homologues of this narrow fissure, the

⁽⁵⁷⁾ ZERVOS, *op. cit.*, pl. 63.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Sir A. EVANS, *The Palace of Minos*, vol. I, London, 1921, p. 42.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ V. MÜLLER, « Mykenische Fundgegenstän-

de in Berliner Völkerkunde Museum », *Praehistorisches Zeitschrift*, 19, 1928, pp. 307-39, pls. 34, 35.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ GRAZIOSI, *loc. cit.*, pl. 29 a.

terminal cupmark and tongue-like taper tempt one to suggest that it may be a serpent symbol. However, I know of no clear evidence from Libya itself to support this interpretation. The nearest African rupestral engravings of footmarks and cupules (not grouped) amid an obvious serpent representation are from Ango, Uélé, in Zaïre, bordering southern Sudan and Uganda ⁽⁶¹⁾.

Still, the parallelism between the five pairs of rupestral cupmarks alongside the canalicular fissure at Udei El Chel and the symbols on the Aegean objects remains an extraordinary fact.

An equally intriguing parallel between north African and Cretan symbolism may exist on a painted jar from pre-Dynastic Egypt (fig. 34). It belongs to the Amratian culture, a neolithic society with Libyan affinities. Hornblower ⁽⁶²⁾ identified the taller of the two painted figures as masculine owing to the penis-like appendage with its apparent penis-sheath, a device of Libyan origin but also known in early Crete. However, Scharff ⁽⁶³⁾ suggested that the figure could represent a female since another Libyan relic is known which shows a woman wearing an object shaped like a penis-sheath. Murray ⁽⁶⁴⁾ regards both figures on the Amratian jar as female. That the scene in fig. 34 represents a fertility rite is not disputed. The features of interest are that the zigzags between the legs are analogous to the zigzag on the Cretan idol in fig. 29, and that the hatched triangle has numerous, exact counterparts in the Aegean: Matz ⁽⁶⁵⁾ describes a Late Minoan jar with a band of small, closely spaced triangles of this kind painted below a broad panel consisting of a [probably] serpent-scale motif. Hogarth and Welch ⁽⁶⁶⁾ noted a « predilection for [hatched and chevroned] triangles and zigzags » on the Kamares ware of Crete and its immediate neolithic predecessors. A pot from the Cyclades ⁽⁶⁷⁾ has large hatched triangles and immediately below them is an encircling sinuous line. However, the symbolism of serpent and pubic triangle cannot be firmly deduced in such examples, since naturalistic equivalents are, as far as I am aware, unknown, and the analogies ultimately hinge solely upon how one interprets motifs like those in figs. 29 and 30.

Though pudenda are generally not depicted on Aegean anthropomorphic figurines, the folded-arm idols of the Cyclades are an exception. In Early Bronze Age II, c. 2500 B.C., pudenda are common on the Cycladic ritual vessels termed frying pans (fig. 36). Placed in the exergue of these clay vessels, the sexual symbolism contrasts with the uncertain meaning of other motifs accompanying the pudenda — the sun, the ship, and the sea as represented by linked spirals. To these should be added the zigzag, whose interpretation

⁽⁶¹⁾ G. DERKINDEREN, *Atlas du Congo Belge et du Ruanda-Urundi*, Paris-Brussels, 1955, fig. 5.

⁽⁶²⁾ G. D. HORNBLOWER, « The Egyptian Fertility Rite: a postscript », *Man*, 43, 1943, p. 29.

⁽⁶³⁾ A. SCHARFF, « Some Prehistoric Vases in the British Museum », *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 14, 1928, pp. 261-76.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ M. A. MURRAY, « Burial Customs and Beliefs in the Hereafter in Predynastic Egypt »,

Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, 42, 1956, p. 92.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ F. MATZ, *Forschungen auf Kreta*, 1942, Berlin, 1951, pl. 49.3.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ D. G. HOGARTH, F. B. WELCH, « Primitive Painted Pottery in Crete », *JHS*, 21, 1901, (pp. 78-98), p. 96.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ C. ZERVOS, *L'art des Cyclades du début à la fin de l'âge du bronze, 2500-1100*, Paris, 1957.

so far has been neglected. It figures prominently on the sides of, sometimes above, ships incised on these ritual objects as in the examples from the island of Syros in fig. 35, taken from Tsountas ⁽⁶⁸⁾. In a polychrome sherd from Iolkos, Thessaly, a bold zigzag enclosed within an ellipse is the only decoration on the side of a ship with a ramming fore-end ⁽⁶⁹⁾. It is dated to c. 1600 B.C., which indicates the prevalence of the symbol over an extended period outside the Cyclades as well; similar specimens are also known from Mycenae.

The only clue as to the meaning of these zigzags comes from literary sources: « Hipponax urges a painter called Mimnes “not to go on painting a snake on the many-benched side of a *trieres*, so that it seems to be running away from the ram towards the helmsman” (possibly the ship’s peculiar device or *semeion*) » ⁽⁷⁰⁾. But Hipponax lived in the 6th century B.C., so, even granting a continuity of artistic traditions, it is not clear whether the serpent motif on the *trieres* preserved an ancient religious sentiment or was no more than a naval badge. Thus, though the primeval meaning of the symbols on Cycladic frying pans remains obscure, there is, in view of their undisputed cultic character, a plausible basis for the belief that the zigzag inscribed over their ship motif denotes the serpent.

It will be noticed that a profusion of tiny, stamp-incised triangles fill the borders of these pans. Whether they are purely decorative or repeat emblematically the pubic triangle which is so unambiguous on the exergue near the handles is conjectural. In many Cycladic pots, these tiny, incised triangles fill bands and large, triangular spaces. In the frying pans, they fill triangular spaces between the rays issuing from the sun’s disc (fig. 36). Or they fill the circular borders in double rows. The close association of these tiny, stamp-incised triangles with the sun motif and with zigzags on the ships in fig. 35 is noteworthy. In the complex symbolism of the Cycladic Islands these motifs probably are more than a part of the decorative art of a cult centered around fertility or rebirth and the veneration of serpents. Excavations on the island of Melos, which had cultural contacts with Crete at least by Early Minoan II, have yielded not only sherds bearing naturalistically drawn serpents but forms suggestive of them occur also as “serpent ring vases”, as markings on a bull (?) rhyton and on numerous other mortuary clay objects ⁽⁷¹⁾.

CONCLUSION

As some of our examples show, it is possible to envisage the derivation of symbols from cult objects which express the notion of fertility or rebirth unambiguously through motifs of the pubic triangle and the serpent. This is most apparent in certain anthropomorphic figurines of the Near East and we need not discuss the evidence further. But in

⁽⁶⁸⁾ CH. TSOUNTAS, « Kykladika II », *Ephe-
meris Archaïologike*, 1899, p. 90.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ D. R. THEOCHARIS, *Archaeology*, 11, 1958,
(pp. 13-18), p. 15.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ J. S. MORRISON, R. T. WILLIAMS, *Greek*

Oared Ships, 900-322 B.C., Cambridge, 1968,
p. 120.

⁽⁷¹⁾ T. D. ATKINSON *et al.*, *Excavations at
Phylakopi in Melos*, London, 1904, p. 21 and
pl. 4 q.

the Aegean world the evidence is not equally direct; it is only highly suggestive in some cases and concealed or absent in others. In general terms, the hazards of reading meanings different from those intended by the prehistoric artist are formidable. It is surely for this reason that concerted efforts at *interpreting a particular genre* of symbols over a wide geographical area are infrequently made. Archaeological reports do not often overstep broad comparisons of style; or are "scientific" in the sense that the hazy zone of symbolism, excepting the obvious cases, is either avoided or the more elusive graphic and plastic forms are subjected to accurate, but neutral, analysis under the category of decoration.

Yet, it is likely that primitive man embellished his cult objects not for decorative effects alone, but to identify their ritual connections and to enhance their magical power. Of course, with the passage of time the original designs become stylized and tend to lose meaning with repeated or mechanical use, especially on secular articles. But the symbols of the serpent and of the mother-goddess's sexuality are expressed directly so often that the more cryptic artistic examples need not be played down overcautiously. Ophiolatry appears to have been prevalent with varying emphasis almost everywhere in the ancient world. The serpent is regarded by some as a phallic emblem. There is support for this view from the areas we have considered, but owing to the complex origins of serpent worship a world-wide generalization is not warranted. In particular, serpent worship must be analysed as a phase of man's religious and social evolution, using very diverse sources of data, including extensive support from anthropology.

The ophiolatrous side of man's religious development must already have been an old one as the migrations of the earliest neolithic period were taking shape. Symbols of the cult were constantly undergoing regional differentiation, and transmuting and submerging themselves into the designs we today term "art". The remarkable thing, however, is that striking parallels can also be found in far-flung regions.

Proponents of the view that north Africa and Crete had affinities in neolithic and Early Minoan times might see significance in the peculiar design and numerological features common to the rupestal engravings at Udei El Chel, in Libya, and the Cretan and Mycenaean objects described above; some might consider the zigzags on the skirts of archaic Cretan figurines and on the figures on the Amratian jar in fig. 34 as more than coincidences — not to mention the widespread prevalence in the Aegean of the hatched triangle, also seen on this jar. Still others might see parallels in the upraised hands of the Amratian figures and of certain mortuary figures described by Iakovidis ⁽⁷²⁾. These are known from Rhodos, Naxos, Boeotia, Attica and Cyprus but are commonest in Mycenae. In one Mycenaean specimen, four such figures alternate with triangles and are dressed in typical Minoan rather than Mycenaean skirts.

These analogies must be examined *vis-à-vis* other facets of north Africa. The important serpent-goddess, Mert Seger, of southern, Pharaonic Egypt, as Bruyère ⁽⁷³⁾ points out, is

⁽⁷²⁾ S. E. IAKOVIDIS, « A Mycenaean Mourning Custom », *AJA*, 70, 1966, pp. 43-50.

⁽⁷³⁾ B. BRUYÈRE, « Mert Seger à Deir el Me-

dineh », *Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire*, 1930, pp. 36-37.

« thébaine de naissance, mais de filiation libyenne ». Archaic Nubian terracottas from Aniba, in southern Egypt, whose populace is generally believed to have been Libyan in origin, include boat-shaped cult vessels with vagina-like spouts (even flecked to represent pubic hair and ridged to identify the vulva); the oldest of the black polished bowls with white filled incised decoration from Aniba bear zigzags, chevrons, triangles and naturalistic representations of serpents but of no other animals ⁽⁷⁴⁾.

Proponents of Anatolian influence in the Aegean might point to specific resemblances besides those noticed in the idol from Kos (fig. 28). Excavations at the Bronze Age (c. 2400 B.C.) cemetery at Karatas-Samayük, not far inland from the coast of southwestern Anatolia, an area known to have had ties with Minoan Crete and with Mycenae ⁽⁷⁵⁾ include painted, beaked pitchers with a remarkable motif. A zigzag design divides the body of these pitchers into large triangular panels. The triangles whose apices point downward each contain a prominent, rope-like loop. Whether this Anatolian design symbolizes the pubic triangle and serpent cannot be proven. However, on Mycenaean mortuary vases (c. 1400-1100 B.C.) on which zigzags and naturalistic serpents are so common, the Anatolian loop and triangle design is paralleled by many variations ⁽⁷⁶⁾. The latter have been identified as flower-buds ⁽⁷⁷⁾ but since floral motifs are hardly seen in related Mycenaean mortuary-ware, this interpretation seems unlikely. Indeed, Desborough ⁽⁷⁸⁾ shows two almost identical vases, one from Ialysos, in the Dodecanese, and the other from the Cycladic island of Naxos, midway to Mycenae. On each there is a pair of serpent effigies applied to the top of the vessel. Between these is a hatched triangle (eroded in the Naxos vase) but a loop is absent.

We shall conclude with two intriguing examples, whose symbolic features if not actual affinities take us much farther afield from the eastern Mediterranean.

We have seen in the Cycladic frying pans that while a sexual emblem is clearly recognizable there is no direct evidence as to the meaning of the zigzag. For at least one variety of the latter, that associated with ships (fig. 35), there are close analogies from Scandinavia, where sun and ship motifs are frequent in rupestal engravings. In several of these, serpents loom over longships much like the Cycladic zigzag ⁽⁷⁹⁾.

The second example is an extraordinary stele (fig. 37), the only one of its type known from Greece. It was excavated in Thessaly by Biesantz ⁽⁸⁰⁾ at Souphli, near Larissa, a tract

⁽⁷⁴⁾ G. STEINDORFF, *Aniba. Mission Archéologique en Nubie 1929-1934*, Glückstadt-Hamburg, vol. I, 1935, pl. 33.2-6.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ M. MELLINCK, « Excavations at Karatas-Samayük in Lycia, 1965 », *AJA*, 70, 1966, pp. 245-57, pl. 58, figs. 11, 12.

⁽⁷⁶⁾ R. WOLF, « Die Nekropole an Prophitis Elias bei Tiryns », in *Tiryns*, vol. 6, Mainz am Rhein, 1973, pls. 55, 56.

⁽⁷⁷⁾ W. VOIGTLÄNDER, « Zur Chronologie der SpätMykenischen Burger », in *Tiryns*, vol. 6,

Mainz am Rhein, 1973, p. 251.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ V. R. D'A. DESBOROUGH, *The Last Mycenaeans and Their Successors*, Oxford, 1964, pl. 7c, d.

⁽⁷⁹⁾ P. GELLING, H. E. DAVIDSON, *The Chariot of the Sun [and other rites of the northern bronze age]*, New York-Washington, pp. 41 ff., fig. 19.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ H. BIESANTZ, « Bericht über Ausgrabungen im Gebiet der Gremmon-Magula », *AAntz*, 72, 1957, cols. 38-52.

where, as Cook ⁽⁸¹⁾ observes, a chthonian cult of Zeus as the serpent Meilichios is attested since prehistoric times. The stele is not precisely dated; but it is significant that it was found in the vicinity of neolithic, cremation burials which are very rare in the region, but nothing of later periods occurred here. It has diminutive breasts and probably represents a mother-goddess. The right hand apparently rests over the pubes. It is important to note that the "head" is triangular, with a small face (that of an emerging foetus?) peering out of its centre, and that serpents are carved in low relief on the sides of the stele.

The resemblance of this Thessalian stele to the statue-menhirs of southern France, such as the one from Mas Capelier (Aveyron) (fig. 38) is notable, particularly owing to an analogous positioning of the paired feet. Equally remarkable are the heads of the Mas Capelier statue-menhir and a related one from Serre-Grand. They are non-human and triangular, markedly so in the latter, and their visage seems reptilian. It is noteworthy, moreover, that a stone head with a face very akin to that of these southern French specimens is also known from Malta ⁽⁸²⁾. It is the island's earliest known datable piece of sculpture. There are occasional overtones of ophiolatry in the archaeological records of Brittany, for instance on dolmen no. 4 from Gavr'Inis there are five (six?) parallel, vertical sinuous bands with knobbed "heads" and slightly tapered "tails". They are obvious representations of serpents, identified as such and considered to be datable to the French megalithic period ⁽⁸³⁾. The many-stranded "necklace" pattern of the Thessalian stele is repeatedly paralleled by the engravings on the menhirs of Brittany.

The relevance of these observations is that current views regarding early patterns of culture diffusion reject the possibility of Aegean origins and hold that developments of the megalithic cultures of Malta, Iberia and France were independent ⁽⁸⁴⁾. Thus, the Thessalian stele is an enigma. Its salient emblems, the serpents on its sides and the triangular head, lead us back to the Aegean where traditions of serpent worship and the mother-goddess are more pronounced, and ultimately to the Levant and Mesopotamia where the symbols of her cult are most transparent. Their assemblage in these brief notes, however, merely calls attention to the occurrence of artistic convergences among ethnically unrelated peoples without implying that symbols are necessarily indicators of culture diffusion.

⁽⁸¹⁾ COOK, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 1155.

⁽⁸²⁾ J. D. EVANS, *Malta*, London, 1959, pl. 48.

⁽⁸³⁾ S. MINOT, « Les gravures et la religion mégalithique » (chap. 12), in Y. ROLLANDO, *La Préhistoire du Morbihan*, Vannes, 1971; M. et St. JUST PÉQUART, Z. LE ROUZIC, *Corpus de*

signes gravés des monuments mégalithiques du Morbihan, Paris, 1927, pls. 5, 101, 110, 125.

⁽⁸⁴⁾ G. DANIEL, « Spain and the Problem of European Megalithic Origins », in *Estudios dedicados al Professor Dr. Luis Pericot*, Barcelona, 1973, pp. 209-14.



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The Religion of the Hittites

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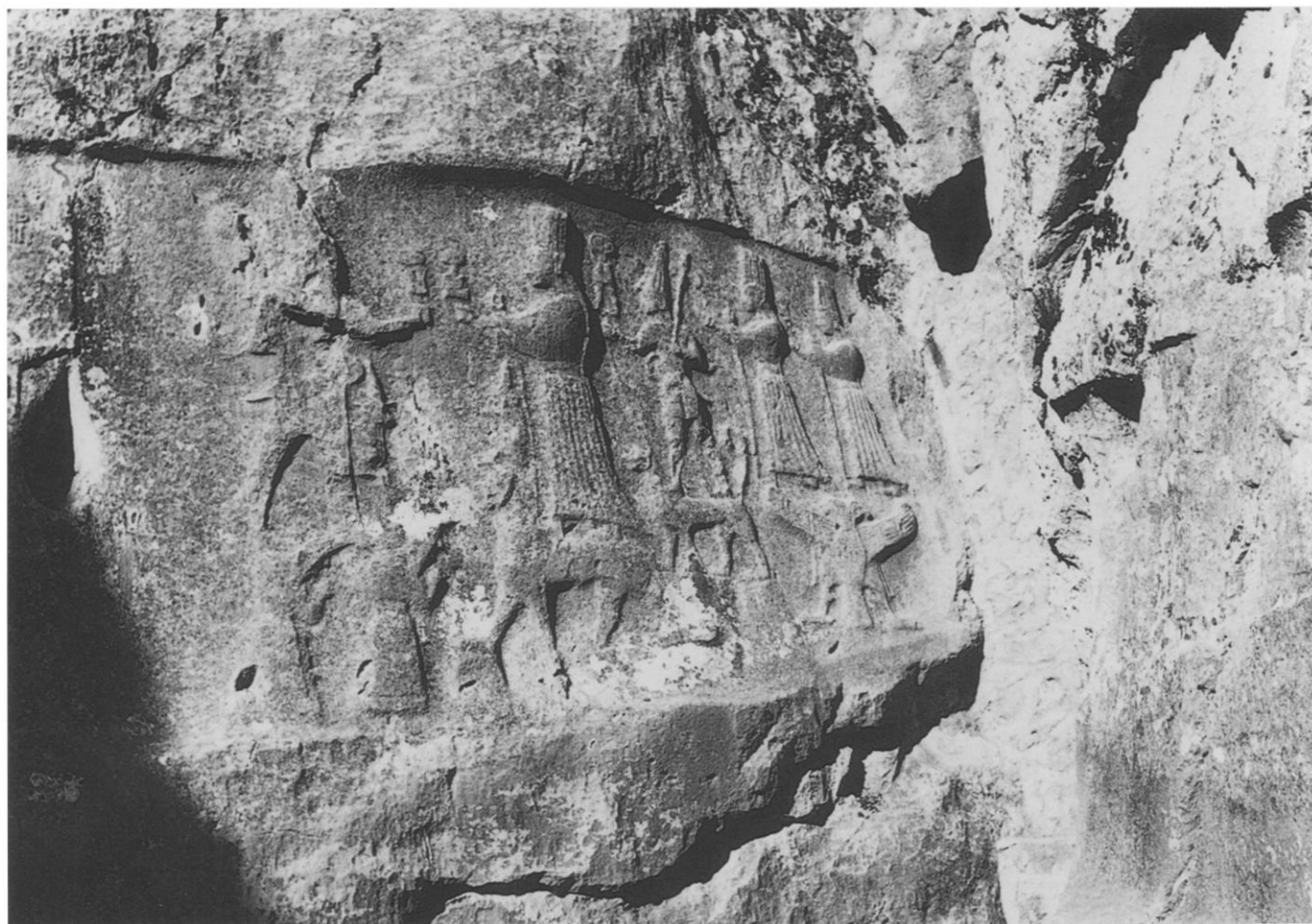


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The Religion of the **HITTITES**

by Gary Beckman



The recovery of Hittite religion is difficult because the creators of the available textual sources did not intend to convey a coherent picture to outsiders. The knowledge we have depends chiefly on the thousands of cuneiform tablets discovered in the ruins of the royal city of Hattuša, modern-day Boğazköy. Among these tablets, however, there are no canonical scriptures, no theological disquisitions or discourses, no aids to private devotion (Laroche 1971;

Bittel 1970: chapter 1). Rather, the scribes employed by the Hittite kings compiled their archives in the service of the royal administration. These records aided the bureaucracy in the organization and maintenance of all areas of royal responsibility, many of which the modern observer would consider to be religious.

The study of Hittite religion must therefore be based on various types of practical documents: temple regulations and records of cultic administration, prescriptions for the

In this relief from the main chamber of the rock sanctuary Yazılıkaya, located just outside the city walls of Hattuša, a procession of male gods (to the left) led by the Weather-God greets a procession of goddesses led by the Sun-Goddess of Arinna, here given her Hurrian name Hebat. This grand procession, which wraps itself around the contours of the rock, presumably represents the divine court attendant during the celebration of the new year's festival. The Weather-God wears a tall horned cap, characteristic of his divinity and rank. He stands on two bending Mountain-Gods and greets the Sun-Goddess, who wears a flattened, cone-shaped hat and stands on a lioness. Photo by Jeanny Vorys Canby.

Hittite religion was concerned with the central preoccupation of peasant life: the fertility of crops, animals, and people.

proper performance of ceremonies, reports of diviners, religious compositions used in scribal education, and so on. Most of the tablets that we have date to the last 50 years or so of the Hittite Empire, although some earlier compositions are available, either as original tablets or in later copies.

To the textual evidence may be added the testimony of other archaeological discoveries, including a few small divine images and other cult objects (Güterbock 1983), the iconography displayed on seals (Beran 1967; Mora 1987) and rock reliefs (Kohlmeyer 1983; Alexander 1986), and ground plans of temples (Bittel 1970: 55–59; Neve 1987).

General Character of Hittite Religion

At its base, Hittite religion was concerned with the central preoccupation of peasant life on the central plateau: the fertility of crops, domestic animals, and people. This interest is clearly expressed in an excerpt from a prayer:

To the king, queen, princes, and to (all) the land of Ḫatti give life, health, strength, long years, and joy (in?) the future! And to them give future thriving of grain, vines, fruit, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, mules, asses—together with wild animals—and of human beings!¹

The world of the primitive farmer and herdsman is reflected throughout Hittite religion. The chief deity retained the clear features of a growth-sustaining Storm-God, even while presiding over the political structure of the Hittite Empire (Goetze 1957: 138–42; Deighton 1982). Geographic elements such as springs and mountains, both conceived as sources of fructifying

water, played an important role, and the cultivation of grain and the increase of herds were each represented by a deity (Hoffner 1974: 82–85; Beckman 1983: 55–56). The Hittites naturally endeavored to understand the numinous through imagery drawn from the daily experience of peasant life. Thus the character and majesty of many deities were made manifest through an association with some animal, wild or domestic. Gods were frequently depicted as standing on their associated beasts; some were even represented in animal form (Lebrun 1985).

The Pantheon

The most prominent figures in the state cult were a Storm-God, who was brought into Anatolia by the Indo-European newcomers, and a kind of Sun-Goddess borrowed from the indigenous Hattic people. In spite of her designation, the latter deity was chthonic, or infernal, in character and was a member of the long line of Anatolian fertility gods reaching from the so-called Mother-Goddess of Çatal Höyük in the sixth millennium all the way to Cybele and Diana of the Hellenistic period. This divine couple were presumably worshiped in the twin cellas of Ḫattuša's largest temple.

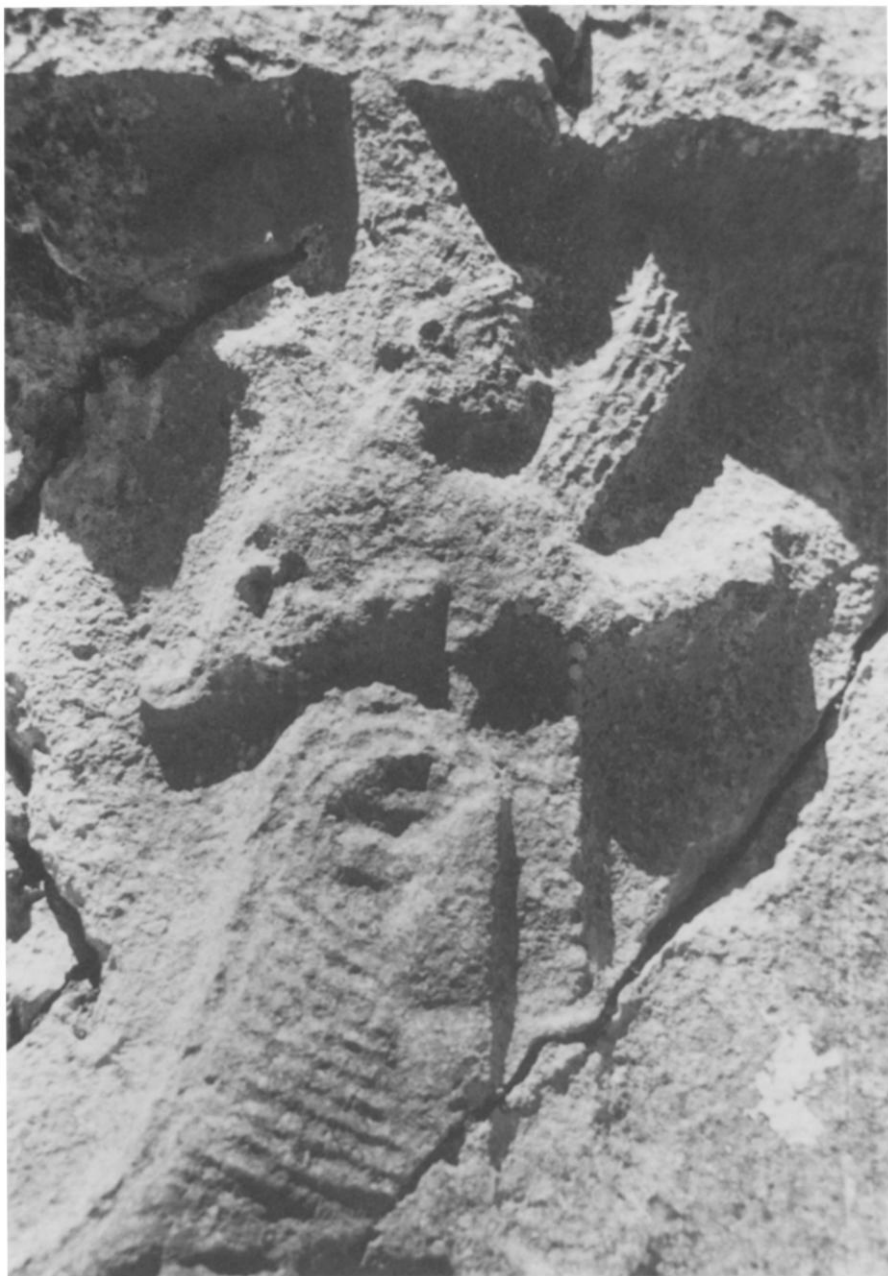
The number of individual deities mentioned in the Hittite texts is staggering (Laroche 1947; Gurney 1977: 4–23). The Hittites themselves referred to their “thousand gods,” but many of these figures are cited infrequently in the texts and remain little more than names to us today. This multiplicity is due in part to a resistance to syncretization. For example, many Hittite towns maintained individual storm-gods, declining to identify the local deities as manifes-

tations of a single national figure.

As the Hittite state expanded from its core in central Anatolia, the range of gods mentioned in the royal archives came to include deities that were worshiped in the urban centers of Syria and Mesopotamia as well as those of Indo-European and Hattic origin. In the earliest period, the Hattic deities of cult centers such as Nerik (Haas 1970) and Ḫattuša predominated, later to be joined by increasing numbers of newcomers at home in regions to the south and east. The Luwian deities of Ḫupešna, Ištanuwa, and Lallupiya, and particularly the Hurrian gods of Samuḫa (Lebrun 1976), Kummanni, Karkamiš, and Aleppo should be mentioned here. Lists of divine witnesses to treaties present the imperial pantheon most clearly (Kestemont 1976), although it is puzzling that these groupings omit several otherwise prominent deities.

In the thirteenth century B.C.E. some efforts were made at systemization, and many divinities were grouped into *kaluti*, or “circles” of males and females, as depicted visually in the bas-relief processions of Yazılıkaya. It is significant that, although their iconography makes most of these deities immediately recognizable as long-standing members of the Hittite pantheon, their hieroglyphic labels give their names in Hurrian (Laroche 1948, 1952). That is, syncretization had finally been carried out. This process is also reflected by an invocation from a prayer of queen Puduḫepa:

Sun-Goddess of Arinna, my lady, you are the queen of all lands! In the land of Ḫatti you have assumed the name Sun-Goddess of Arinna, but in respect to the land which you



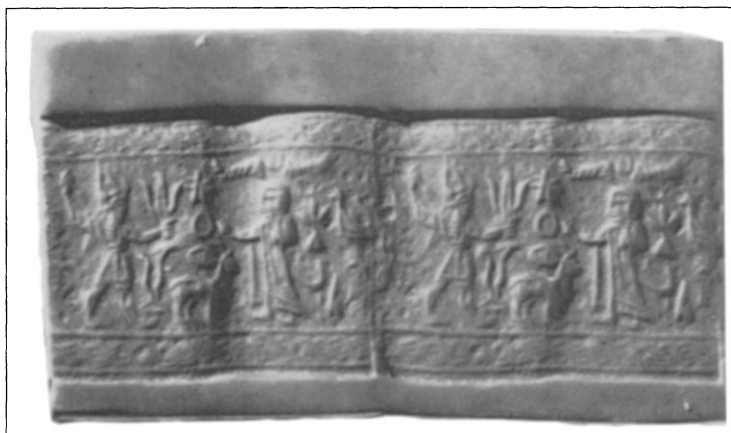
have made (the land) of cedars (that is, Syria), you have assumed the name Ḫebat.²

This systematizing approach reflected the opinion of only a small group at the Hittite court, however, and at no time was a single unitary hierarchy of gods established.

The Place of the King

To the Hittites, the universe was a continuum. There was no strict separation between gods and humans. The two classes of beings were interdependent and existed alongside the world of plants and animals, from which both ultimately drew their sustenance. The gods were literally dependent on the offerings presented by humans, who, conversely, could thrive only when the deities who controlled the basic processes of nature were well disposed toward the agriculturists and stock-breeders. This situation is well illustrated by a complaint of king Muršili II:

All of the land of Ḫatti is dying, so that no one prepares the sacrificial loaf and libation for you (the gods). The plowmen who used to work the fields of the gods have died, so that no one works or reaps the fields of the gods any longer. The miller-women who used to prepare



Above: The many-faceted Semitic goddess Ištar, whose realm included sexuality and armed combat, appears frequently in texts dating to the Middle Kingdom as well as the Empire period of Hittite history. The goddess is shown here as part of the long procession of gods in the main chamber of Yazılıkaya. Photo by Ronald L. Gorny. **Left:** This modern impression of the seal of Ehli-kuša illustrates the iconography of two important Hittite deities. On the left stands the Storm-God, holding his mace and the "w"-hieroglyph representing his name. The figure on the right wears the robes and skull-cap common to the Sun-God and the human king, but the sun-disc above his head assures us that it is the deity who is intended here. Photo courtesy of the Yale Babylonian Collection (16575).

At death, the king was said
“to become a god” and began
to receive cultic observances.

sacrificial loaves of the gods have died, so that they no longer make the sacrificial loaves. As for the corral and sheepfold from which one used to cull the offerings of sheep and cattle – the cowherds and shepherds have died, and the corral and sheepfold are empty. So it happens that the sacrificial loaves, libation(s), and animal sacrifices are cut off. And you come to us, o gods, and hold us culpable in this matter!³

The monarch occupied a central position in Hittite ideology (Güterbock 1954; Gurney 1958). He was the linchpin of the universe, the point at which the sphere of the gods met that of human beings. As chief priest of the Sun-Goddess of Arinna, the king was responsible for the proper service of the gods by humankind and, in turn, represented human society before the awesome power of the gods. In a ritual dating to the Old Hittite period, the monarch speaks of his charge:

The gods, the Sun-God and the Storm-God, have entrusted to me, the king, the land and my household, so that I, the king, should protect my land and my household for myself.⁴

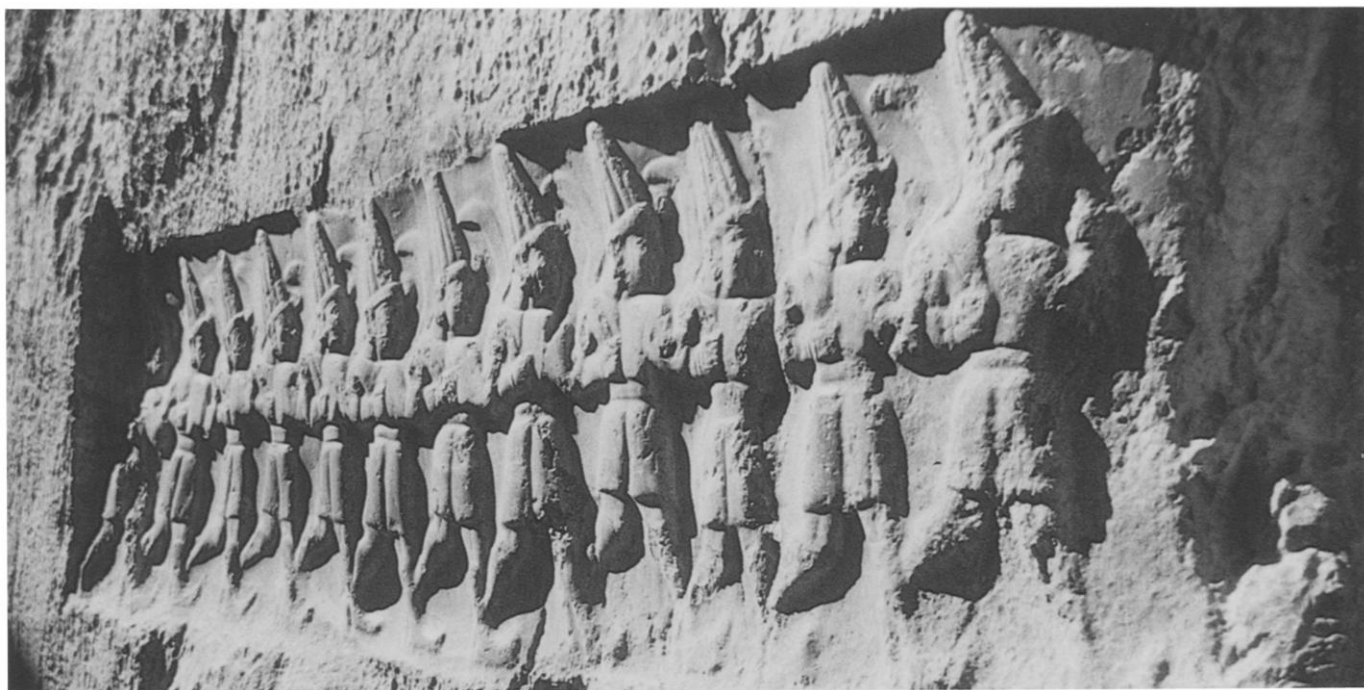
Although to a certain extent the king was identified with the male Sun-God, as shown by his costume and his title “My Sun” (Kellerman 1978), he was not deified until after his death, at which time he was said “to become a god” and began to receive cultic observances (Otten 1958). Indeed, it is believed that a section of Yazılıkaya served as the mortuary temple of king Tudḫaliya IV (Bittel 1970: chapter 4).

The queen, in turn, had a special relationship with the Sun-Goddess (Bin-Nun 1975: 197–202), and all



In Hittite ideology there was no strict separation between gods and humans. Gods depended on humans for offerings, and humans depended on gods for good harvests. The king occupied a central position in this interdependent relationship, representing the point at which the sphere of the gods met that of human beings. As chief priest, he was responsible for the proper service of the gods by humankind and, in turn, acted as the representative of human society before the awesome power of the gods. The relationship between a king and his personal god is seen in this rock relief, also from Yazılıkaya, which shows Tudḫaliya IV in the embrace of his personal god Šarruma. Notice the tall horned cap worn by Šarruma and the king's cartouche in the upper righthand corner. Photo by Jeanny Vorys Canby.

In the small chamber at Yazılıkaya, twelve gods carrying scimitars over their shoulders are shown running in unison, their bodies overlapping. These gods, who are also shown at the end of the long procession in the main chamber, were apparently part of the divine court attendant at the new year's festival performed in honor of the Storm-God. Photo by Ronald L. Gorny.



defunct members of the royal family received occasional offerings (Otten 1951). All households were responsible for the service of their ancestors (Archi 1979b), however, so the afterlife of Hittite royalty was probably just a grander version of that awaiting the ordinary person.

The State Cult

The needs and desires of the Hittite gods were conceived of as being similar to those of humans of high rank. The temple of a god was simply his house, and strict regulations governed the service and behavior of priests within its precincts (Korošec 1974). Temples housing the most important divinities were large establishments containing many storerooms and workshops where products necessary for divine service were produced (Güterbock 1975). Outside the city extensive tracts of

agricultural land were devoted to the support of these divine households, and, consequently, the temples were an important part of the Hittite economy (Klengel 1975).

The primary religious functions of the state were carried out in the numerous temples of the capital, but the king and his government were also ultimately responsible for the more modest shrines that served minor deities throughout Hatti. We are indebted to a census made of local cults during the late thirteenth century B.C.E. for information about the worship and iconography of many Hittite deities (von Brandenstein 1943; Carter 1962). The following report on the cult of a small village is typical:

The town Lapana, (chief deity) Iyaya: the divine image is a female statuette of wood, seated and veiled, one cubit (in height).

Her head is plated with gold, but the body and throne are plated with tin. Two wooden mountain sheep, plated with tin, sit beneath the deity to the right and left. One eagle plated with tin, two copper staves, and two bronze goblets are on hand as the deity's cultic implements. She has a new temple. Her priest, a male, is a holdover.⁵

Regardless of whether his temple was large or small, within his cella the deity was cared for—fed and clothed—by his priesthood. Because these activities were performed routinely, they are rarely discussed in the texts, but the texts do give information about the special divine festivals or parties that were held in honor of these deities (Güterbock 1969–1970). The schedule of worship varied for each deity; some festivals were held monthly or yearly,

If the requisite worship was performed according to its stringent requirements, the deities were pleased and favored the king.

whereas others marked particular moments in the agricultural calendar, such as the reaping of a harvest or the cutting of grapes. In general, fall festivals featured the filling of storage vessels with the bounty of the harvest, while spring festivals centered around the opening of these vessels. It seems that a new year's festival was performed in honor of the Storm-God of Hattuša in the main galleries of Yazılıkaya (Otten 1956); the divine court attendant upon this occasion is depicted in the reliefs executed there.

Because the celebration of important festivals for the most prominent deities throughout central Anatolia required the presence of the king, these festivals were organized into a spring and a fall series, known collectively (and respectively) as the *festival of the crocus* (Güterbock 1960) and the *festival of haste* (Kořak 1976). During the spring tour the king was required to travel for at least 38 days, although in some instances it was permitted for the queen, a prince, or even a symbolic animal hide to substitute for the monarch.

Hittite festivals generally consisted of food offerings, often in the form of a communal meal uniting god and worshipers (Archi 1979a), toasts to the deities (Kammenhuber 1971), and entertainment. The gods were amused in various ways: through athletic competitions, such as foot races, horse races, and the throwing of heavy stones, through mock battles, and through the antics of jesters. The gods were also treated to music performed by various types of musicians on a wide variety of instruments (Gurney 1977: 34–35). Unfortunately we know very little about the character of Hittite music

or the lyrics sung, for specific information was usually not recorded (Kümmel 1973).

If the requisite worship was performed on time and according to its stringent requirements, the deities were pleased with and favored the king, granting him personal longevity and numerous offspring and running before him in battle. In turn the Hittite state and its inhabitants prospered. Most important, Hittite armies were victorious, and Hittite farmers raised bumper crops. But if for any reason the gods were unhappy with how the worship was performed, they might invoke sanctions resulting in the most negative effects, from personal sickness to national calamity. Indeed, almost any ill was interpreted as a manifestation of divine anger. After much effort, for example, Muršili II learned that divine displeasure at a neglected festival and a broken treaty with Egypt was the cause of the plague afflicting Hatti.

Descriptions of Hittite festivals are monotonous to read because the largely repetitive ceremonies are described in minute detail. This passage should convey the flavor of these compositions:

The king and queen, seated, toast the War-God. The *halliyari-men* (play) the large INANNA-instruments and sing. The clapper-priest claps. The cupbearer brings one snack-loaf from outside and gives (it) to the king. The king breaks (it) and takes a bite. The palace functionaries take the napkins from the king and queen. The crouching (cupbearer) enters. The king and queen, standing, toast the (divinized) Day. The jester speaks; the clapper claps; the

kita-man cries "*aḥa!*"⁶

Our knowledge of native Anatolian mythology is drawn largely from such texts, for tales of primordial activities by the gods were sometimes recited during a festival as a way of encouraging the gods to maintain the order of the world they had established long before. Thus, two versions of the struggle between the Storm-God and a cosmic serpent were told during the course of a spring festival (Beckman 1982).

Ritual

In contrast to the festivals, which were performed at regular intervals, another category of rite was intended for use only as the situation required. Such ceremonies are usually referred to as rituals. Texts describing these ceremonies give us our best view of popular religion because many were not composed in Hattuša but were collected by royal scribes throughout the Hittite realm. In most of the ancient Near East, rituals were recorded anonymously, but in Hatti such compositions were often named after the practitioner from whom they were elicited. Although the so-called author of a ritual is occasionally said to be a priest, more often female experts in magic bear the title "old woman," and men are referred to as "seer."

Many Hittite rituals were rites of passage intended to ease the transition of an individual from one stage or station in life to another. Thus we have many texts describing rituals for birth (Beckman 1983), one for puberty (Güterbock 1969), and several for death (Otten 1958). Rituals for the enthronement of the monarch are alluded to (Kümmel 1967), but no actual text has survived. The purpose of the majority of rituals, how-

Myth of Illuyanka

Few of the mythological texts from the Hittite archives have attracted as much attention as this one (CTH 321), which narrates the combat of the Storm-God with a foe designated simply by the Hittite common noun for snake or serpent, *illuyanka*. Although all of the preserved tablets whose size is sufficient to allow dating belong to the Empire period, there can be little doubt that this text itself is an Old Hittite composition. Many archaic grammatical features support this judgment.

Other commentators have discussed many aspects of this text, for example, its reflection of Anatolian marriage customs, its use of widely attested folkloristic motifs, and its relationship to Greek mythology. For my part, I would stress that the two mythological narratives of CTH 321, like all known examples of what Hans Güterbock has termed *Anatolian mythology*, are contained within a ritual context. §§ 1 and 2 make this explicit—the *purulli*-festival is performed both when, and in order that, the land should thrive, and the myths are the texts of this festival. These tales clearly present several religious etiologies, the most important of which is the establishment of a royal cult in the town of Kiškilišša, but more significant is the provision of a mythological paradigm for a human situation. Hittite society had to cope with and understand the alternation of periods of growth and stagnation. The obvious symbolizing in CTH 321 of the former by the Storm-God and of the latter by the serpent has led to the interpretation of the entire myth as basically an example of the Frazerian Dying God myth, but I feel that the resolution of the crisis of the seasons through the combined efforts of humans and deities is the most significant element here.

In the first version of the myth, only the help of Hupašiya enables the Storm-

Translation

- §1 (This is) the text of the *purulli* (festival) for the [. . .] of the Storm-God of Heaven, according to Kella, [the "anointed priest"] of the Storm-God of Nerik: When they speak thus—
- §2 "Let the land grow (and) thrive, and let the land be secure (literally 'protected')"—and when it (indeed) grows (and) thrives, then they perform the festival of *purulli*.
- §3 When the Storm-God and the serpent came to grips in (the town of) Kiškilišša, the serpent smote the Storm-God.
- §4 (Thereafter) the Storm-God summoned all the gods (saying): "Come in! Inara has prepared a feast!"
- §5 She prepared everything in great quantity—vessels of wine, vessels of (the drink) *marnuwan* (and) vessels of (the drink) [wa]lhi. In the vessels she ma[de] an abundance.
- §6 Then [Inara] went [to] (the town of) Ziggarratta and encountered Hupašiya, a mortal.
- §7 Inara spoke as follows to Hupašiya: "I am about to do such-and-such a thing—you join with me!"
- §8 Hupašiya replied as follows to Inara: "If I may sleep with you, then I will come and perform your heart's desire!" [And] he slept with her.
- §9 Then Inara transported Hupaši[ya] and concealed him. Inara dressed herself up and invited the serpent up from his hole (saying): "I'm preparing a feast—come eat and drink!"
- §10 Then the serpent came up together with [his children], and they ate (and) drank—they dra[nk] up every vessel and were sated.
- §11 They were no longer able to go back down into (their) hole, (so that) Hupašiya came and tied up the serpent with a cord.
- §12 The Storm-God came and slew the serpent. The (other) gods were at his side.
- §13 Then Inara built a house on a rock (outcropping) in (the town of) Tarukka and settled Hupašiya in the house. Inara instructed him: "When I go out into the countryside, you must not look out the window! If you look out, you will see your wife (and) your children!"
- §14 When (Inara went away and) the twentieth day had passed, he looked out the win[dow] and [saw] his wife (and) [his] children.
- §15 When Inara returned from the countryside, he began to whine: "Let me (go) back home!"
- §16 Ina[ra] spoke as follows [to Hupašiya: " . . .] away [. . .] . . . [. . .]" with anger [. . .] the meadow of the Storm-God [. . .] she [. . . killed?] him.
- §17 Inara [went] to (the town of) Kiškil[ušša] (and) set her? house and [the river?] of the watery abyss? [into] the hand of the king—because (in commemoration thereof) we are (re-)performing the first *purulli*-festival—the hand [of the king will hold? the house?] of Inara and the riv[er?] of the watery abyss?.
- §18 (The divine mountain) Zaliyanu is fir[st] (in rank) among all (the gods). When he has allotted rain in (the town of) Nerik, then the herald brings forth a loaf of *harši*-bread from Nerik.
- §19 He had asked Zaliyanu for rain, and he brings it to him [on account of?] the bread . . .
(several damaged lines followed by a gap of about 40 lines)
- §20' This [. . .]
- §21' Because? [. . .] spoke. The ser[pent] defeated the Storm-God

and took (his) h[ear]t and eyes.] And him the Storm-God [. . .]
§22' And he took as his wife the daughter of a poor man, and he sired a son. When he grew up, he took as his wife the daughter of the serpent.

§23' The Storm-God instructed (his) son: "When you go to the house of your wife, then demand from them (my) heart and eyes!"

§24' When he went, then he demanded from them the heart, and they gave it to him. Afterwards he demanded from them the eyes, and they gave these to him. And he carried them to the Storm-God, his father, and the Storm-God (thereby) took back his heart and his eyes.

§25' When he was again sound in body as of old, then he went once more to the sea for battle. When he gave battle to him and was beginning to smite the serpent, then the son of the Storm-God was with the serpent and shouted up to heaven, to his father:

§26' "Include me—do not show me any mercy!" Then the Storm-God killed the serpe[nt] and his (own) son. And now this one, the Storm-God [. . .]

§27' Thus says Kella, [the "anointed priest" of the Storm-God of Nerik:" . . .] when the gods [. . .]

(gap of about 40 lines—insert §§27'a–27'c')

§27'a [. . .] and to him to ea[t . . .] back to Ner[i]k [. . .] he releases.

§27'b [. . .] (the god) Zašhapuna [. . .] (s)he [. . .]ed, and the Storm-God of Nerik [and . . .] went. And Zali[yanu . . .] gave back [. . .]

§27'c [. . .] then he trans[port]ed?? . . . t]o? Ne[ri]k? . . .

§28' [Then f]or the "anointed priest" they made the [fore]most gods the [humb]lest, and the [hum]blest they made the foremost gods.

§29' The cultic tax of Zali(ya)nu is great. Zašhapuna the wife of Zali(ya)nu is greater than the Storm-God of Nerik.

§30' The gods speak as follows to the "anointed priest" Tašpurili: "When we go to the Storm-God of Nerik, where shall we sit?"

§31' The "anointed priest" Tašpurili speaks as follows: "When you sit on a diorite stool, and when the "anointed priests" cast the lot, then the "anointed priest" who holds (the image of) Zaliyanu—a diorite stool shall be set above the spring, and he shall be seated there."

§32' "All the gods will arrive, and they will cast the lot. Of all the gods of (the town of) Kaštama, Zašhapuna will be the greatest.

§33' "Because she is the wife of Zali(ya)nu, (and) Tazzuwašši is his concubine, these three persons will remain in (the town of) Tanipiya."

§34' And thereafter in Tanipiya a field will be handed over from the royal (property) —

§35' Six *kapunu*-measures of field, one *kapunu*-measure of garden, a house together with a threshing-floor, three buildings for the household personnel—it is (recorded) [on?] a tablet. I am respectful of the m[at]te[r]?, and I have spoken these things (truly).

§36' One tablet, complete, of the word of Kella, the "anointed priest."

(colophon)

Piḫaziti, [the scribe,] wrote it under the supervision of Walwaziti, the chief scribe.

God to avenge himself upon his enemy, although one might have supposed that his divine assistant, Inara, could have tied up the serpent and his brood. An essential factor in the second version is the participation of a human female as mother, by the Storm-God, of a son who is seemingly entirely human in nature. The joint effort of human and deity is the common element in the two versions of a myth that otherwise differ greatly in plot. A similar relationship of human and divine is found in the Myth of the Vanishing God (CTH 322–27) where ritual performances on the part of the divine healer Kamrušepa and of a mortal ritual practitioner are both required to placate the absent deity. Indeed, within this latter text, it is not clear exactly where the activities of the goddess leave off and those of the human begin.

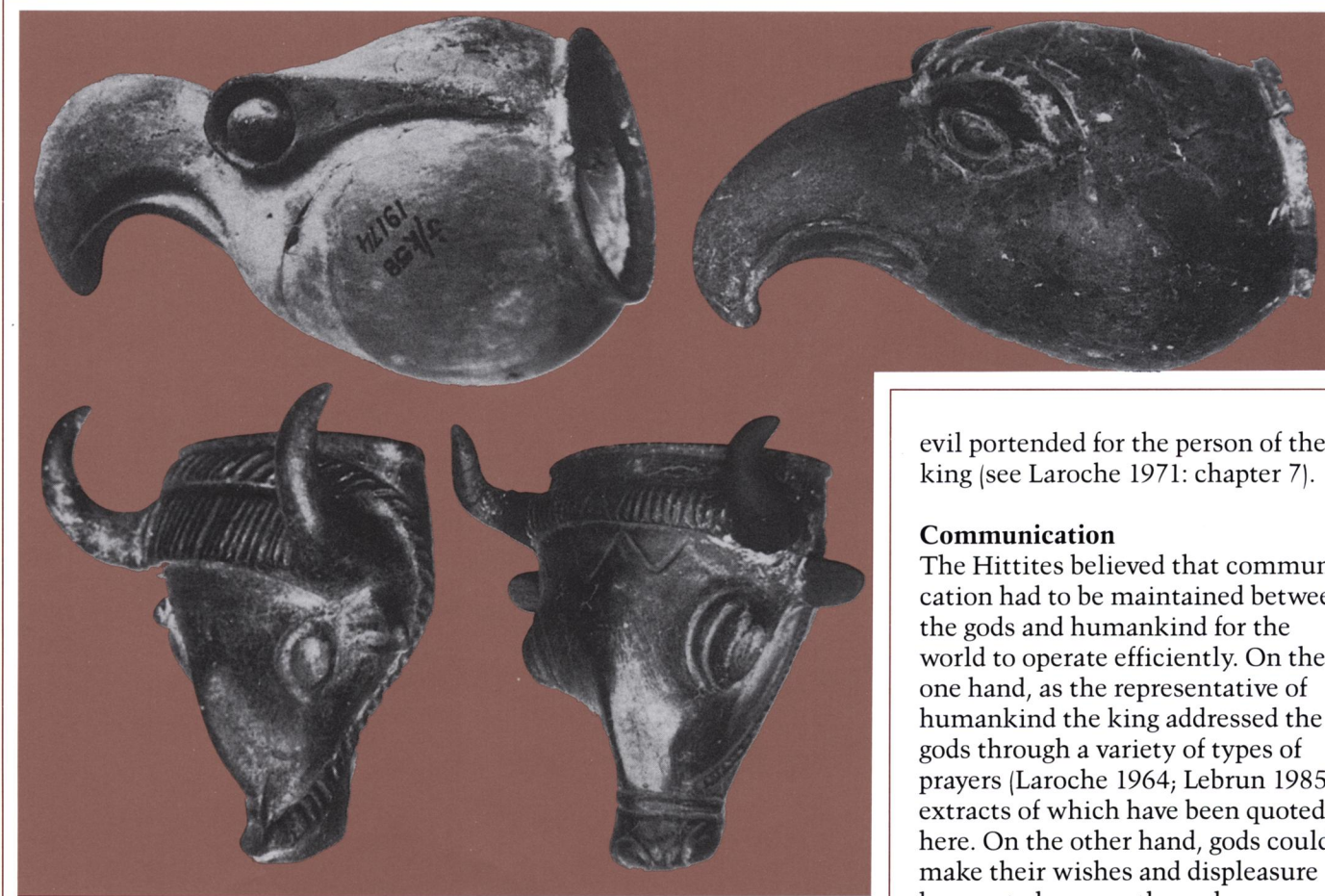
In CTH 321, both Ḫupašiya and the mortal offspring of the Storm-God come to grief. Although the direct causes of their destruction are different—the jealousy of Inara in the first instance and the logic of Anatolian family structure in the second—both mortal protagonists are punished for a too intimate relationship with the deities whom they aid, an intimacy symbolized by sexual intercourse. While Ḫupašiya clearly demonstrates hubris by his demand for the favors of Inara, and the anonymous son of the Storm-God is a blameless tragic figure trapped by his social obligations, both have nonetheless crossed the line separating mortals from deities.

The Myth of Illuyanka gives expression to an important facet of the Hittites' conception of the universe. The activity of everyone contributes to the proper functioning of the cosmos, but each individual must remain in his or her proper place. As the god is to the mortal, so in a sense is the king to the subject.

For a complete edition of the text, accompanied by philological notes, see my previous article (1982). This sidebar is adapted from that article.

— Gary Beckman

Clay vessels in the shape of animals were often used for ceremonial purposes. These bull-shaped rhytons and eagle-shaped rhytons were found at the site of the *kārum* at Kaneš. Photos courtesy of Tahsin Özgüç.



evil portended for the person of the king (see Laroche 1971: chapter 7).

Communication

The Hittites believed that communication had to be maintained between the gods and humankind for the world to operate efficiently. On the one hand, as the representative of humankind the king addressed the gods through a variety of types of prayers (Laroche 1964; Lebrun 1985), extracts of which have been quoted here. On the other hand, gods could make their wishes and displeasure known to humans through omens or oracles. Omens were messages from gods to humans, most frequently encountered through dreams (Oppenheim 1956: 254–55). Much more important were the oracles, procedures through which humans solicited information from the gods. Countless records of augury, extispicy (divination through the reading of animal entrails), and a curious type of lot oracle (Kammenhuber 1976) have been preserved in the archives. These divination techniques were often used as checks on one another.

Pleas made by Muršili II in an effort to determine the cause of the plague afflicting Hatti underline the need for communication

ever, was the restoration of a person to his or her proper functioning within a particular sphere of life. The cause of the impairment might be divine anger, but the problem might also be due to *papratar*, a kind of pollution. Whether this pollution was the result of a person's own misdeeds or had been sent by an enemy through black magic, it had to be removed and rendered harmless. This was often accomplished by means of analogic magic. A typical incantation reads:

As a ram mounts a ewe and she becomes pregnant, so let this

city and house become a ram, and let it mount the dark earth in the steppe! And let the dark earth become pregnant with the blood, impurity and sin!¹⁷

It is interesting to note that most of the analogies used in such magic were drawn from the daily experience of the Hittite peasant.

A wide range of difficulties could be countered by a ritual. There were ceremonies designed to alleviate such problems as family strife, sexual impotence, and insomnia, and we also know that rituals were performed to ward off plague, military defeat, or

between gods and humans:

Or if people are dying for some other reason, let me see it in a dream, or let it be established through an oracle, or let a prophet speak it! Or in regard to whatever I communicate (as a possible cause of the epidemic) to all the priests, let them investigate it through incubation!⁸

Conclusion

In this short presentation I have tried to show that the religious conceptions of the Hittites were congruent with their social system and ecological situation. Like the king and other members of the ruling class, the gods stood far above the ordinary Hittite, dispensing favors or punishments according to their pleasure. At the same time, all inhabitants of the Hittite world were mutually dependent, and the labors of the peasant agriculturalist and pastoralist were the basis upon which all else — human and divine — rested.

Notes

- ¹ KUB 24.2 rev. 12'–16' (see glossary listing for KUB).
- ² KUB 21.27 i 3–6.
- ³ KUB 24.3 ii 4'–17'.
- ⁴ KUB 29.1 i 17–19.
- ⁵ KUB 38.1 iv 1–7.
- ⁶ KUB 25.6 iv 5–24.
- ⁷ KUB 41.8 iv 29–32.
- ⁸ KUB 14.8 rev. 41–44, as restored from duplicates.

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Within one month after the end of the appointment, the Professor must compile a report of results achieved during the appointment and send it to the Professorship Selection Committee. (A portion of the stipend will be withheld until this report is received.) In addition, the Professor will be required to submit a brief report about his or her accomplishments and experiences for publication in the appropriate ASOR journal.

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Gesture and Alterity in the Art of Ashurnasirpal II of Assyria

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Gesture and Alterity in the Art of Ashurnasirpal II of Assyria

Megan Cifarelli

Long considered the hallmark of the art of the Assyrian Empire, the massive stone relief sculptures that decorated the interiors of ancient Assyrian palaces in northern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) appear to have been introduced to Assyria during the reign of a remarkable ruler, Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.E., Fig. 1).¹ By the time he ascended to the throne in the ninth century B.C.E., the history of Assyria already spanned a millennium, from its mercantile roots in the early second millennium, to its rise to political and cultural prominence in the “international age” of the middle centuries of the second millennium, to its “dark age” at the turn of the millennium.² The artistic florescence that characterizes the reign of Ashurnasirpal II accompanied the quickening of an era of military aggressiveness, territorial acquisitiveness, and a marked increase in the grandeur of the Assyrian capitals. In the course of his yearly military campaigns into neighboring territory, Ashurnasirpal forcibly collected enormous quantities of luxury goods, furniture, agricultural produce, raw materials for building, and perhaps most important, captive labor. A particularly grandiose gesture on the part of this Assyrian king was the removal of the primary center of the Assyrian government from the city of Ashur, where it had rested since Assyria’s inception a thousand years earlier as a political and cultural entity. He founded a new capital further north on the Tigris River at the ancient city of Kalhu, which became known as Nimrud.³

The art that decorated the palaces created for Ashurnasirpal’s new capital and provincial centers includes both narrative reliefs that lined the palace interior, particularly the Throne Room of the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal at Nimrud (Figs. 2, 3),⁴ as well as miniature scenes embossed on bronze bands decorating the gates of a royal palace and the Mamu Temple at the site of Balawat (Fig. 6).⁵ A variety of subjects are depicted in these expensive, labor-intensive media. Many feature mythical scenes of the king in the company of supernatural creatures, and others depict the king engaged in royal rituals. Of those representations that were historical narratives, however, the vast majority feature depictions of the Assyrian army on campaign in foreign lands, accumulating foreign prisoners and booty, and the Assyrian king receiving the tributaries and tribute of foreign lands.⁶ In other words, the narrative decorative programs in Assyrian palaces focus for the most part on the interaction between Assyrians and non-Assyrians, and they portray this interaction in terms of hostility and the ultimate subjugation of foreign lands and people.

The postures and gestures of non-Assyrians in these scenes, ranging from their crouching posture to hand gestures and the disposition of their weapons, made them appear—especially to the eyes of the Assyrians viewing this art—strange, contemptible, and out of step with Assyrian values.

Through the language of gesture, these images communicate the identification of intercultural difference with intracultural transgression and the subversion of Assyrian social codes. Moreover, within the context of the stories told in Assyrian narrative art, many of these strange non-Assyrian figures are shown meeting dreadful fates, ranging from capture (Fig. 2) to horrific mutilation (Fig. 3). The internal logic of these visual stories, then, often portrays a violent death as the natural consequence of the violation of Assyrian values that these strange gestures embody. The notion of the merciless punishment of transgressions and the wisdom of conformity serves as a powerful message for the foreign visitors to Assyrian palaces, as well as the members of the Assyrian court itself.

The central assumptions brought to bear on the interpretation of the representations of non-Assyrians in this article are first, that palatial decorative schemes were carefully designed to function as a form of visual propaganda, and second, that the content and appearance of this art contributes to, promulgates, and is determined by a specifically Assyrian cultural ideology.⁷ The word *ideology* is used here to indicate a belief system that informs and is expressed by all facets of cultural production. It is a means of understanding the mechanism by which power structures based on unequal distribution of power and resources are able to maintain the status quo.⁸ The cultural production of the central power, in this case the royal inscriptions and palace decoration, are thereby considered to be ideologically weighted. That is to say, they communicate ideologically charged messages to a particular audience.

Even the choice of stone relief as the medium for palace decoration in this period has ideological implications. The application of this elaborately carved stone “wallpaper” to the mud-brick palace walls involved the adaptation of an essentially foreign, in this case north Syrian, medium of architectural decoration to an already ancient Assyrian tradition in style and subject matter.⁹ The use of stone reliefs rather than more traditional decorative media such as painted plaster or brick represents a greater expenditure of time, as well as human and natural resources. Enormous blocks of stone had to be quarried and transported (Fig. 4), then carefully carved and inscribed. The selection of this costly and labor-intensive medium for the decoration of Ashurnasirpal’s palaces and temples illustrates the inextricable causal and ideological links that existed in this era of intensive empire building among the conquest of neighboring territory, the use of prisoners of war as captive labor, the creation of a lavish new capital, and the development of propagandistic decorative programs.¹⁰ It appears that royal construction projects and their elaborate decorative programs were built quite



1 Northwest Palace, Nimrud, ca. 865 B.C.E., Room G, slab 8. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 1932

literally on the backs of prisoners of war who had been acquired during Ashurnasirpal's military campaigns.

These images, then, communicated highly organized and specific messages about the nature and goals of Assyrian power. One of the tenets of the ideology expressed and formulated through the art of Ashurnasirpal—created at a time when Assyria was engaged intensively in building an empire at the expense (literally and figuratively) of its neighbors—was a negative conception of alterity, of the *otherness* or cultural difference ascribed to foreigners. In this system, the features that distinguish non-Assyrians from Assyrians were understood to be inherently sinister and abnormal.

Their dropped weapons (Fig. 25) and curved backs (Figs. 8, 9) were, in effect, calling out for the retributive action of the Assyrians.¹¹

In light of the ideological and propagandistic nature of these images, any notion of their objectivity as historical documents must be relinquished. Their subjectivity is illustrated by the fact that, according to Assyrian royal inscriptions and palace reliefs, the Assyrian army was continually victorious, and every Assyrian soldier unfailingly valorous. Each image is the end product of a complex series of representational choices, choices that governed all aspects of its appearance, from such general issues as the point in the narrative



2 Northwest Palace,
Nimrud, Room B (Throne
Room), slab 17 lower.
London, British Museum



3 Northwest Palace,
Nimrud, Room B (Throne
Room), slab 4 upper.
London, Brit. Mus.

that is portrayed to specific features of individual figures in the scene. Freed, then, from pursuing empirical questions regarding the historical “truth” of Assyrian narrative art (what “really” happened), one can focus more productively on the manner in which the stories are told. Of particular interest is the interpretation of the representational choices that contribute to the appearance of individual figures and scenes and the reception of these features by a contemporary audience.

Early in the Neo-Assyrian period, one of the most important components of the audience for these narrative images was the Assyrian royal court itself, an elite, male body whose power appears on occasion to equal and even surpass that of the Assyrian king.¹² Like any royal court, the Assyrian court was riddled with intrigue, with frequent coups d'état and assassination attempts. Indeed, two Assyrian kings, Tukulti-Ninurta I and Sennacherib, were reported to have been murdered by their own sons.¹³ Clearly, it was in the king's interest to promote conformity, solidarity, and obedience within the ranks of courtiers.

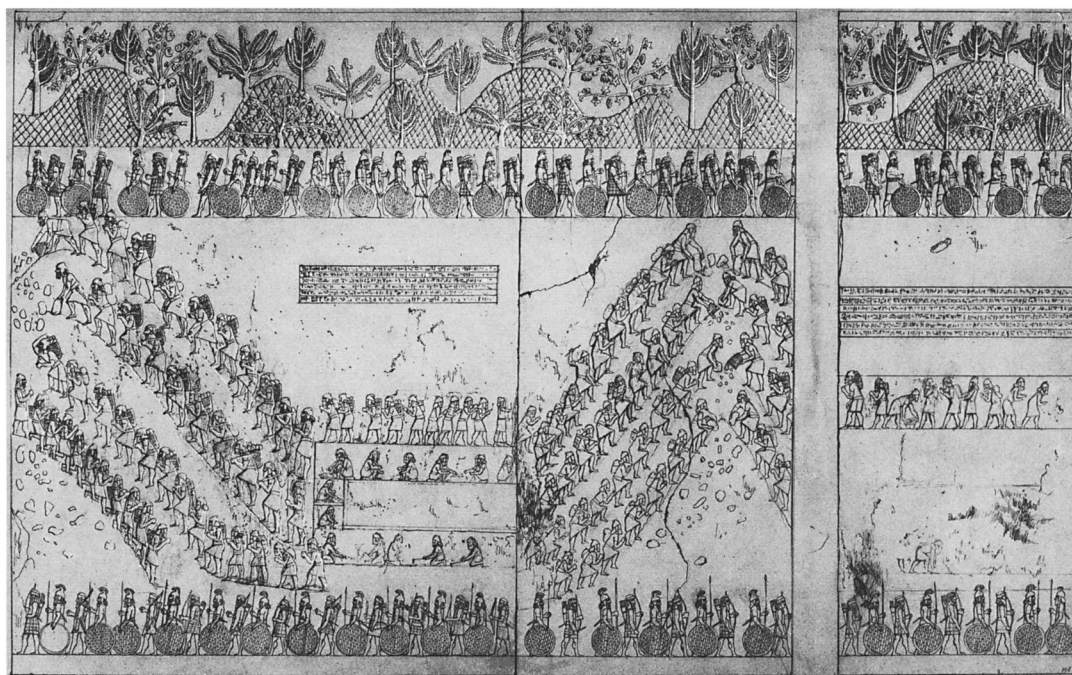
As time went on and the Assyrian capital became increasingly cosmopolitan and international, more and more foreigners—ambassadors, tributaries, merchants, captives—were incorporated into the audience for these images. By the late eighth century B.C.E. a large proportion of the urban population was foreign,¹⁴ and Aramaic—the West Semitic language and alphabet native to the regions near the Mediterranean

coast—became an important second language and writing system in Assyria. The assimilation of Aramaic speakers in Assyria led to their rise to power in the Assyrian army and court.¹⁵ In the face of this foreign influence and influx, the powers that be in Assyria strove to retain Assyrian cultural traditions and values. Sargon II, ruling Assyria at the end of the eighth century, was asked by an official if royal correspondence could be conducted in Aramaic rather than in Assyrian cuneiform signs. The king soundly rejected his plea, stating “your letters had better be written in [cuneiform] signs just like these.”¹⁶ This letter shows us that the Assyrian king privileged local traditions over foreign ones. The distinction between Us and Them, Assyrian and non-Assyrian, and ultimately Right and Wrong that this privileging illustrates is also evident in Assyrian art of the ninth century B.C.E.

Foreigners most often appear in scenes from the military campaigns of Assyrian kings in foreign territory. They are engaged in battle with the Assyrian army (Fig. 6), bear tribute to the Assyrian king (Figs. 7, 8), or are shown as captives (Fig. 2). Later in the Assyrian Empire foreigners appear in the direct service of the Assyrian king, whether as workmen on construction projects (Fig. 4) or incorporated into the Assyrian army.

It is not difficult to detect the non-Assyrians in Assyrian art. Because these narrative images tell tales from the Assyrian point of view, Assyrians and non-Assyrians always differ in their narrative roles. Simply put, in every kind of interaction,

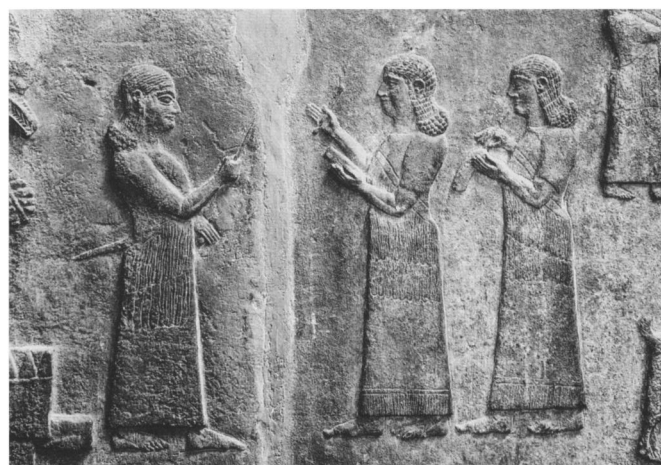
4 Southwest Palace, Nineveh, reign of Sennacherib, Court VI, slabs 66–68. London, Brit. Mus.



Assyrians are dominant, and the foreigners are subjugated, or in the throes of subjugation. Assyrians also used a number of techniques to distinguish among the depictions of various groups of non-Assyrians. Sometimes they used cuneiform captions to identify lands, cities, people, and their rulers, although the reliefs from the palace of Ashurnasirpal lack captions of any kind.¹⁷ Assyrian artists also used details of dress, headgear, facial hair, and hairstyle, as well as types of military equipment as markers of the ethnic or geographic origin of a foreign figure. Non-Assyrians from the Phoenician coast, for example, are generally depicted wearing soft caps, long garments, and shoes with turned-up toes (Figs. 7, 8).¹⁸

As the non-Assyrians who had been brought into Assyria were actually assimilated into Assyrian culture, however, they disappeared from the visual record, for they became virtually indistinguishable from Assyrians. For instance, in a scene from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (Fig. 5), two scribes make records of the spoils obtained in a military campaign. The scribe at the left holds a clay tablet, and is therefore writing in the cuneiform signs used to render the Assyrian (Akkadian) language. The scribe at the right, on the other hand, appears to hold a brush and a scroll, a medium associated with the Aramaic language and the West Semitic alphabetic script. The latter scribe probably hails from the western reaches of the Assyrian Empire, but as an Assyrian official he is visually indistinguishable from his cuneiform-writing colleague.

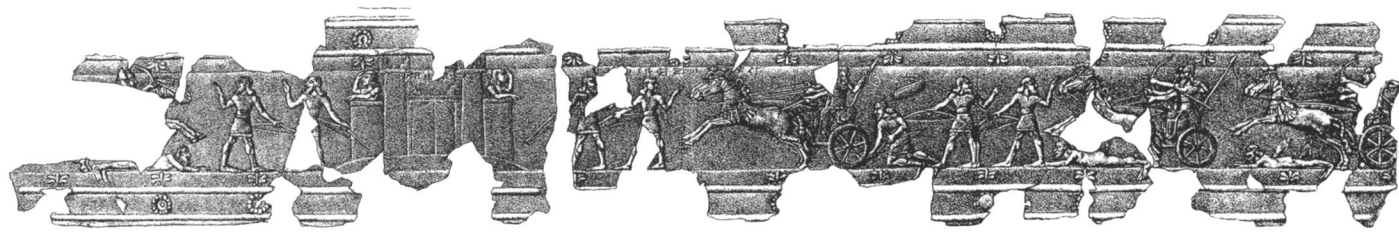
With the exception, then, of fully assimilated, high-ranking foreigners, it is not difficult to recognize and even identify the non-Assyrians who appear in Assyrian art. However, in comparing these visual renderings of foreign armies and leaders with the written accounts found in the royal inscriptions of the Assyrian kings, a puzzling contrast emerges. The documentary record from the early Neo-Assyrian period, consisting primarily of royal inscriptions and official correspondence, is rich and highly biased. We see in it negative characterizations of non-Assyrians in terms of their appearance, behavior, and manners. In the royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal and later



5 Central Palace, Nimrud, reign of Tiglath-pileser III. London, Brit. Mus.

Assyrian kings, particularly Sargon, foreigners are often described as being objectively strange and subhuman. They are compared to animals, their armies described as foolish, barbarous, or cowardly. Their leaders are generally groveling or ill-advisedly rebellious.¹⁹ Moreover, the royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal describe encounters with foreigners on the field of battle in metaphorical terms that equate the defeated enemies with punished criminals.²⁰ The otherness, or alterity, of non-Assyrians in these texts exceeds notions of enmity, in characterizations that approach dehumanization and the violation of Assyrian social and legal codes.

At a glance the visual record appears more equivocal in its characterization of the opposition of Assyrians and non-Assyrians. To modern eyes the figures of non-Assyrians in Assyrian art do not appear to be so different from those of their Assyrian adversaries and overlords (Fig. 6). Can we detect visually the same elision of cultural difference with



6 Palace gates of Ashurnasirpal II, Balawat, ca. 867 B.C.E., band L6, detail. London, Brit. Mus.

social transgression that is couched in metaphorical language in the royal inscriptions? In fact, we can. Through a careful comparison of the figures of non-Assyrians with those of Assyrians we can recognize consistent and significant distinctions between representational conventions for Assyrian and non-Assyrian figures. Cultural difference is encoded in a subtle visual idiom—in fact, embodied in the figures themselves. The most powerful element in this code was the representation of postures and gestures that would have been immediately recognizable to an Assyrian audience. We can approach an understanding of the intellectual effect of this idiom through the detection of correspondences between the observed visual distinctions between portrayals of Assyrians and non-Assyrians and certain features of the royal inscriptions, contemporary literary works, legal text, and the Assyrian language itself. In the remainder of this article I will isolate and attempt to interpret a number of the gestures that are consistently and exclusively associated with foreigners in Assyrian art.

The term *gesture* is used here in its broadest possible sense, encompassing all physical aspects of nonverbal communication: formalized ceremonial, emblematic, and ritual acts as well as a more general notion of demeanor, the physical characterization of behavior. Scholarship of recent years in a broad range of disciplines has recognized that gesture not only serves as an essential nonverbal complement of spoken and written language but also plays an essential role in cultural and gender differentiation.²¹

Most modern research supports the notion that gestures are culturally, rather than biologically, determined, a position first systematically explored by David Efron in his comparison of the gestural styles of two immigrant populations in New York: Yiddish-speaking, Eastern European Jews and Southern Italians.²² This type of research demonstrates that there are few universal or “natural” gestures, and that the meaning of postures, gestures, and even facial expressions is specific within a given culture. There are countless instances of identical gestures that have radically differing meanings within different cultural groups. The gesture wherein the thumb and index finger form a circle, for example, widely understood in the United States and northern Europe to mean “OK,” denotes “zero” in southern France, and in Greece and Turkey signifies an obscenity with homosexual overtones.

Although the notion of the cultural specificity of gestures is at the core of my interpretation, it is the representations of the gestures rather than the gestures themselves that are the subject of this interpretive endeavor. It is impossible, given the incomplete and highly biased nature of the Assyrian

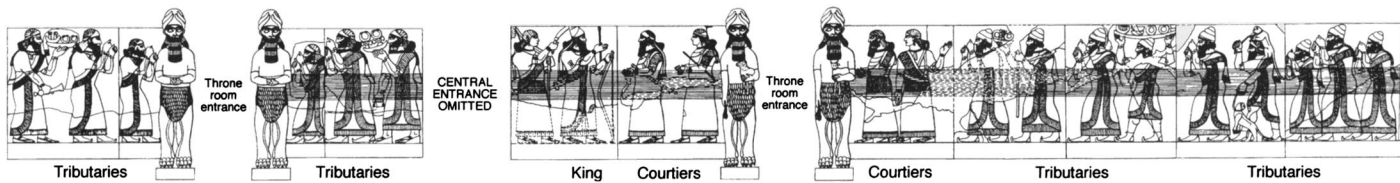
historical record, to determine whether the reliefs accurately portray the gestures of foreigners. Moreover, this study is not concerned with determining the “accuracy” of these historical narratives, for an ideological approach presumes that representations are conventional in nature. The gestures associated with foreigners in the art of Ashurnasirpal are artistic conventions that were selected for the purpose of constructing and communicating the role of foreigners in Assyrian ideology. Our task then, is to attempt to understand the significance of these choices and to interpret the meanings of these conventions for their intended audience.

Close observation of and comparison between the representations of Assyrians and non-Assyrians in the reliefs and bronze gate bands reveal a number of consistently appearing differences in posture, gesture, and general deportment. Having identified these differences, the interpretive task is a challenging one. Assyrian texts, which are primarily concerned with military and administrative matters, do not explicitly discuss the significance of various gestures. To date, modern examinations of Mesopotamian nonverbal communication have focused exclusively on textual references to symbolic acts in legal, royal, and religious contexts, as well as evidence for the physical characterization of emotional states.²³

My interpretation of the manner in which images of these postural and gestural attributes function in the discourse of alterity rests on the positive and negative connotations of Assyrian verbal idioms involving the human body, on contemporary texts describing various gestures in narrative contexts that illustrate their relative status, and to a lesser degree on comparison with similar gestures in other cultures in the region, such as Israel and Egypt. As this discussion develops, it becomes clear that the study of gesture does not provide a monolithic distinction between representations of Assyrians and non-Assyrians, but in fact reveals that representations of non-Assyrians display a range of otherness within which some are nearly indistinguishable from Assyrians, and others are very *other* indeed.

Non-Assyrians as Tributaries

Let us begin with the representations of non-Assyrians as tributaries, the foreigners carrying gifts and taxes to the Assyrian king.²⁴ A figure type that I call the “crouching tributary” is the most common convention for the representation of tributaries. This figure was always shown—and is perhaps best analyzed—juxtaposed with representations of the Assyrian king and his royal attendants (Figs. 7, 8). The Assyrian king and his attendants are without exception depicted with an erect posture and a measured gait. Their backs, waists, and legs are perfectly straight—even rigid—and



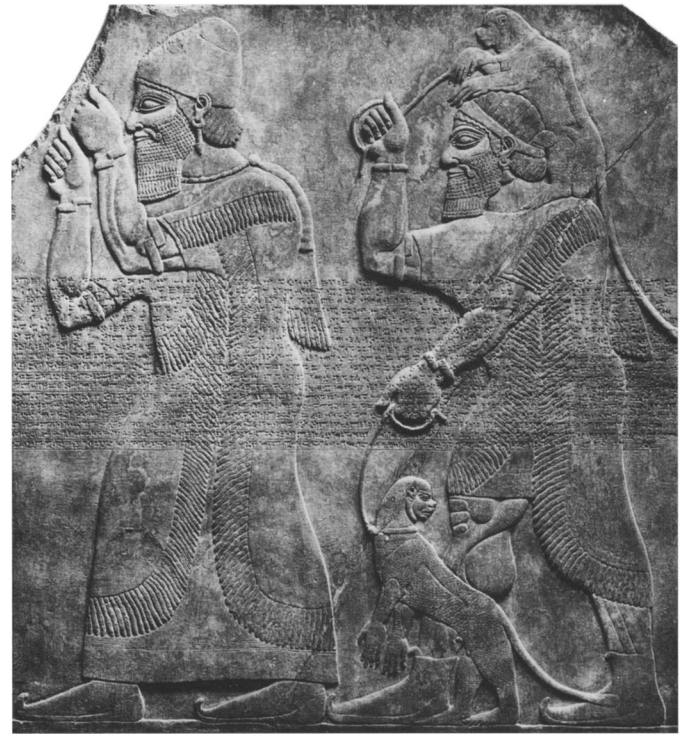
7 Reconstruction drawing of a tributary frieze from the Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Main Courtyard, Throne Room facade (after Paley and Sobolewski, 1992, pl. 4, courtesy Samuel Paley)

their heads are held high. Their feet are evenly spaced and firmly planted on the ground. In sharp visual contrast, the heads of the non-Assyrian tributaries who approach the king from the right are pitched forward, their necks bent. Their overall posture is somewhat crouched, and the pronounced bend at their hips, waists, and knees gives a loose S shape to their bodies that is virtually unparalleled in representations of Assyrians. In purely visual terms, the curves and bends of the non-Assyrian body create lines of force that vary from the strict horizontal and vertical axes that dominate the figures of the Assyrians. These diagonals intersect and veer off, creating the general visual impression of disorder.

How would these postural differences have been viewed by Assyrian eyes and minds? Throughout the Neo-Assyrian period, Assyria was a highly militarized society firmly grounded in rigorous military discipline.²⁵ I suggest that the rigidity apparent in representations of Assyrian posture is the demeanor appropriate to this discipline. Perhaps erect carriage, in addition to embodying Assyrian military ideals, could also represent some codified military tradition (the Assyrians are standing “at attention”), although the type of evidence that would corroborate such an assertion is lacking. The wide sashes encircling the waists of the king and his court emphasize their straight backs and are perhaps analogous to the corsets worn by military men in early modern Europe to augment the appearance of an erect and strong physique.²⁶

Assyrian texts and the language confirm that an upright bearing was associated with dignity and correctness. In a literary work narrating a conversation between the later Assyrian king Ashurbanipal and the god Nabu, the king prays that Nabu not abandon him to his adversaries. Nabu responds to him, “Until the end of time your feet shall not grow slack, your hands not tremble . . . *I will lift your head and straighten your body* [emphasis added].”²⁷ Assyrian idioms involving the human body also suggest the positive connotations of the erect Assyrian posture. As in our language, the Akkadian phrase “to hold the head high” (*rēšu šaqû*) can indicate pride.²⁸ In addition, the word for pace or gait, *alaktu*, sometimes also signifies “correct behavior,” or behavior that is pleasing to the gods.²⁹ Within Assyrian culture, then, it was considered desirable to stand upright, with head held high, and to walk in a particular manner.

The representation of non-Assyrians as “crouching tributaries” signifies more than simply the antithesis of the “goodness” that is associated with correct demeanor, for stooped posture was associated with moral and physical wretchedness, perhaps with the added connotation of religious transgression. In an early Mesopotamian literary composition known as *Ishtar, Queen of Heaven*, a man who has failed to worship the goddess is described as follows: “. . . his lofty stature he bent to



8 Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Court D, slab 7. London, Brit. Mus.

a crook. . . . He was always walking, hunched over, in the outskirts of the city.”³⁰ A verb expressing supplication, *ka-māsu*, is translated literally as “to stoop.”³¹ The Assyrian phrase for “to lower the head” is used figuratively to express low status and humility.³² “To bend the neck,” or *kanāšu kišada*, is used idiomatically as “to submit,” and transitively “to force (someone else) to submit.”³³ The moral implications of a bent neck are also suggested by a phrase in a Babylonian composition: “You make the neck of the proud bow down like an evildoer.”³⁴ These examples illustrate the specific associations in this society between morality, status, and posture, and they help us to understand the way that a contemporary audience would have read the stooped postures in this visual language.

Stooping and bowing gestures are not, however, exclusively associated with non-Assyrians, for mythological and literary texts occasionally refer to the bowing of messengers when they approach the assembly of the gods. Within these compositions, however, this bow takes place in the context of an elaborate greeting formula that requires the gods to return the bow and then stand, and the courier to straighten up again before addressing the gods.³⁵ Clearly, the reciprocation of such a greeting formula is not seen in depictions of the



9 Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Room B (Throne Room), slab 19 lower, detail. London, Brit. Mus.

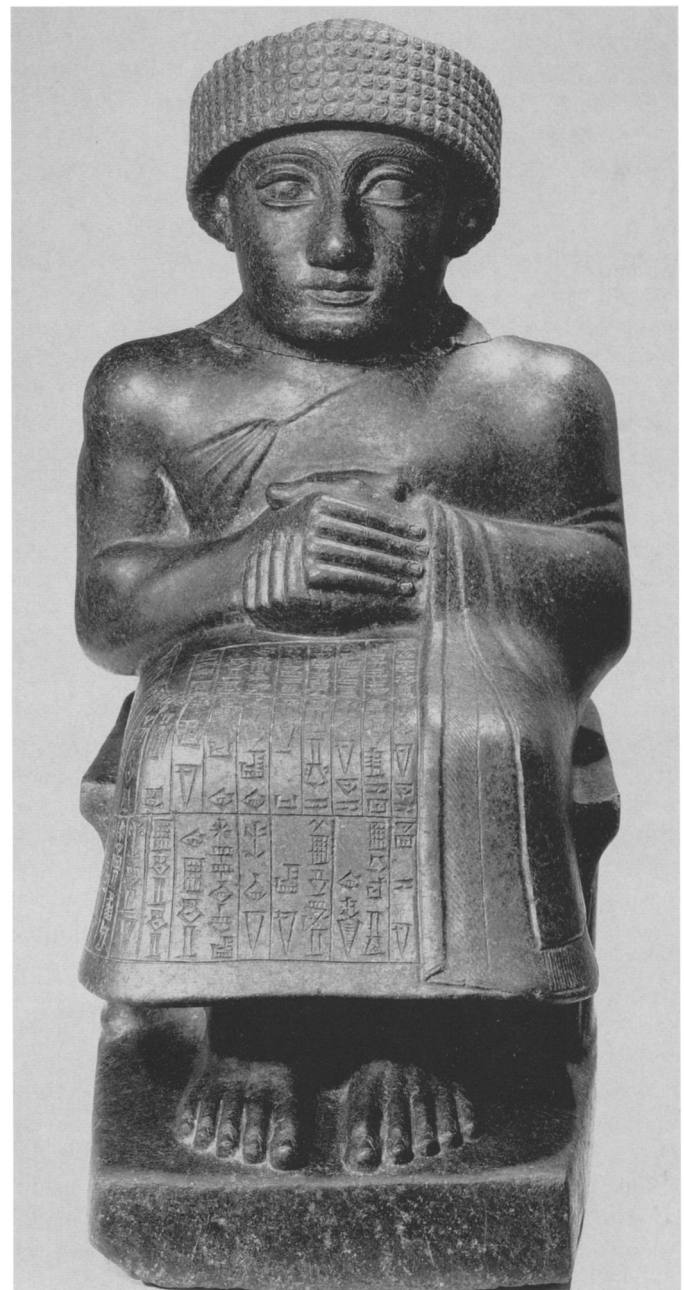
receipt of foreign tribute by the king. The otherness of the non-Assyrian tributaries in these scenes is signified through the *difference* between the posture of Assyrian and non-Assyrian. The “crouching tributary,” when juxtaposed with the erect Assyrian, is in effect shown violating Assyrian behavioral codes that place a high value on standing up straight. As a visual motif, it expresses the foreignness of the foreigners and communicates more specific messages of humiliation and subjection.

While the equation of physical abasement with low status may seem obvious, it is important to point out that the crouched posture of the non-Assyrian tributaries is not simply a natural or universal means of signifying submission or obeisance. The “crouching tributary” figure is the product of a series of representational choices and was intended to carry a more specific meaning. Assyrians made different choices when representing the humility and obedience of Assyrian courtiers before the Assyrian king. Assyrian courtiers, who are beyond a doubt intended to appear submissive to their king, are always rendered in a perfectly upright position (Figs. 7, 9). Their obeisance to the king is usually encoded in their carefully folded hands, an ancient Mesopotamian gesture indicating prayerfulness and respect that is often employed in depictions—particularly in the round—of the king before the gods (Fig. 10). This humble gesture, a motif that expresses obedience without abasement, places Assyrian royal officials in an appropriately respectful attitude before their king.³⁶

An entirely different hand gesture is associated with a number of high-ranking tributaries in the “crouching tributary” pose (Figs. 7, 8, 11). In representations on Ashurnasirpal’s palace reliefs and his gates from Balawat, the files of tributaries are often led by figures, more elaborately dressed than their comrades, who raise one or two fists before their faces.³⁷ Captive foreigners are never shown making this gesture, only non-Assyrian tributaries who bring goods, ostensibly willingly, before the Assyrian king. Assyrian officials are occasionally shown raising a fist in this manner, but only when standing fully erect.

In American culture, we associate a raised fist with power, aggression, and the potential for violence. Consider, for example, the powerful gesture adopted by the Black Panthers. However, the gesture of the tributaries is not aggressive,

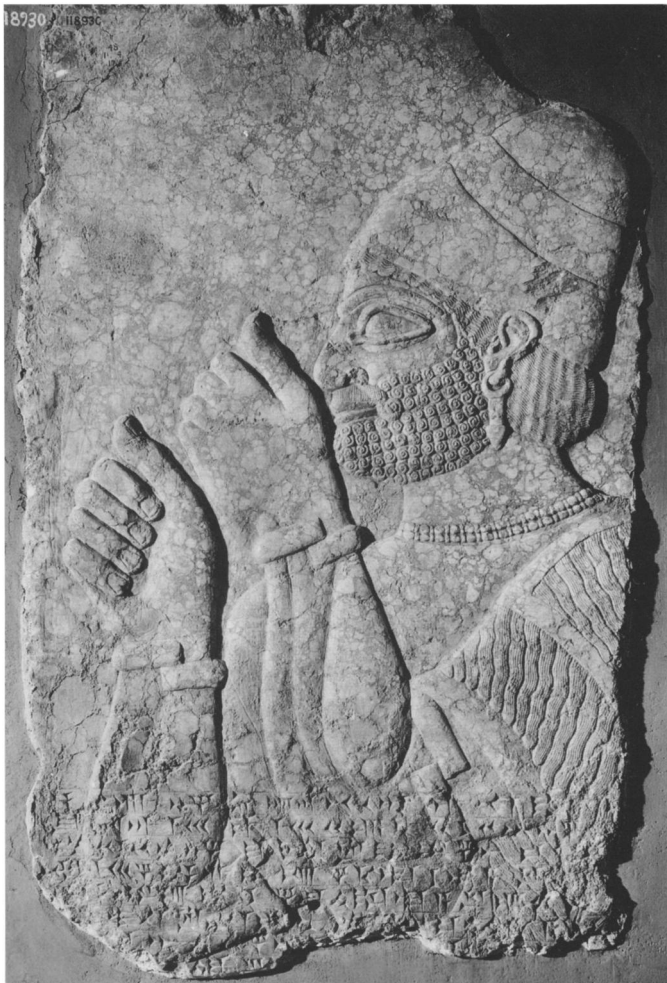
and is similar, although perhaps not identical, to a gesture that involves raising the fist with the thumb fully extended that the Assyrian king often makes before the symbols of the gods (Fig. 12). This royal gesture is described in Assyrian texts as *laban appi*—literally, “to touch the nose,” a ceremonial act that expresses humility and intensified begging for mercy in the presence of divinity.³⁸ The royal inscriptions of a later Assyrian king, Sargon II, suggests that prisoners of war approached the king in the *laban appu* attitude.³⁹ The consistency with which tributaries—particularly their higher-ranking leaders—are represented with their fists raised in this gesture, and its marked resemblance to *laban appi*, strongly suggest that the raising of fists, in conjunction with the crouched posture, was in fact a ceremonial stance or ritual act



10 Figure of Gudea, southern Mesopotamia, Neo-Sumerian period, ca. 2100 B.C.E. New York, Metropolitan Museum, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1959

by which these peoples formally submitted and perhaps pledged fealty to the Assyrian king. The relationship between the Assyrians and non-Assyrians expressed through the use of this gesture—the very act by which the king would beseech the gods—affirms the nearly divine powers of the king over the life and death of those who submit to him.⁴⁰ In doing so it provides the visual equivalent of the following passage in the royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal, in which foreign noblemen approach the Assyrian king, pleading, “If it pleases you kill, if it pleases you spare, if it pleases you do what you will.”⁴¹

The figure of the crouching tributary with fists raised in a ceremonial act of obeisance appears hundreds of times throughout the history of Neo-Assyrian art, occurring as early as the White Obelisk, an undated monument created perhaps as early as the eleventh century B.C.E.⁴² Assyria in the eleventh century, when this visual trope may have emerged, existed in a geographic and political context in which Assyrian hegemony was seriously threatened by the encroachment of another ethnic group—the Aramaeans. A fragmentary historical text from this period alludes to the fact that Nineveh, the capital of northern Assyria, where the White Obelisk was discovered, briefly fell into enemy hands.⁴³ Such conditions stimulated the visual and verbal expression of an ideology based in part on cultural differentiation. The florescence in the reign of Ashurnasirpal II of this motif, with its sharply drawn contrast



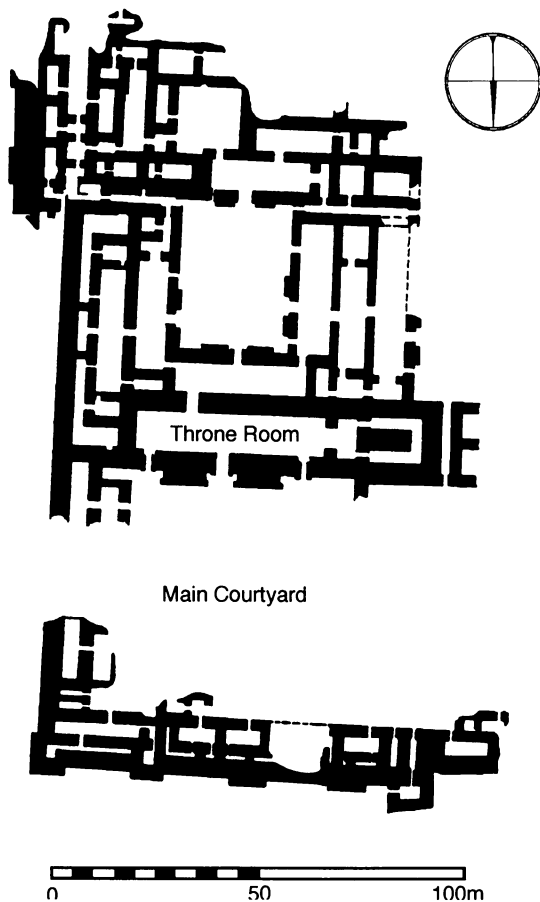
11 Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Room D? London, Brit. Mus.



12 “Grosses Relief,” detail, Bavian, reign of Sennacherib (from Walter Bachmann, *Felsreliefs in Assyrien, Bavian, Maltai, Gundük* [Leipzig, 1969], pl. 11)

between the posture and gesture of Assyrians and non-Assyrians, suggests that this period of empire building, or the conscious enforcement of the hegemony of Us over Them, likewise created an environment that fostered cultural differentiation.

The function of these images of crouching, non-Assyrian tributaries was didactic in part. The accounts of the campaigns presented in the annals of Ashurnasirpal II place submission and the delivery of goods in a narrative context that emphasizes the relative desirability of these actions.⁴⁴ Although these tributaries are unquestionably construed as the Other, their otherness is represented in a more positive light, as being entirely at the service of the Assyrian king. Large-scale versions of these stooping tributary figures appear consistently on the walls of the courtyards outside the main throne rooms of Assyrian palaces, as they do in the courtyard outside the Throne Room of the Northwest Palace.⁴⁵ In such locations, in what was the most public and accessible area of the Assyrian palace (Fig. 13), they provide in effect concrete exempla of appropriate conduct for non-Assyrians. Samuel Paley and Richard Sobolewski have recently suggested that the courtyard of Ashurnasirpal’s Northwest Palace at Nimrud, with its representations of files of richly dressed tributaries bearing sumptuous gifts—all crouching and many with their



13 Plan of the Northwest Palace, Nimrud (after Paley and Sobolewski, 1992, courtesy Samuel Paley)

fists raised—functioned as an arena for the instruction of foreign visitors in conduct appropriate within the Assyrian court.⁴⁶ Their evocative suggestion resonates with the “education” of tributaries as practiced in early imperial China. In China’s Sung dynasty, most international contact took place through a formal tributary system, wherein tributaries from foreign lands would be met at the imperial borders, escorted to the capital, and scrupulously instructed in appropriate etiquette—including the kowtow—before they were permitted to approach the emperor.⁴⁷ Our crouching tributaries, then, not only expressed the power of the Assyrian king over lands, peoples, and goods and characterized non-Assyrians in terms of humiliation and subjugation, they also served as visual etiquette guides for visiting dignitaries.

Another gesture or posture associated exclusively with tributaries in Assyrian art is full or partial prostration (Fig. 14). Prostrate tributaries are uncommon in the art of Ashurnasirpal II—in fact, only one example is known—but they appear frequently in the art of his successors.⁴⁸ The precise posture of these figures is somewhat varied, but in general they kneel with the palms of their hands and their foreheads touching the ground, often in close proximity to the foot of the king.

This prostrate posture is related to an Assyrian phrase used frequently in the inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal to describe the submission of non-Assyrian rulers: “all the kings of the land came down before me and seized my feet.”⁴⁹ I have argued

elsewhere that “foot seizing” is not simply a metaphorical phrase that means submission, but actually describes a codified gesture by which foreign rulers surrendered militarily and politically to the Assyrian king. During the reign of Ashurnasirpal, this ritual seems to appear most often in accounts of either the initial contact between the Assyrian king and non-Assyrian leaders or contact following the suppression of a non-Assyrian rebellion, usually in lands far from the Assyrian centers.⁵⁰

In the above discussion of “crouching tributaries,” I presented the textual evidence for the equation of lowered posture with humiliation and the violation of Assyrian cultural values. Certainly, on these grounds alone the prostrate tributary—virtually flattened on the ground—would have been seen in a negative light by Assyrian eyes. But above and beyond this general negativity, I believe that these representations of tributaries prostrating themselves illustrate the formal gesture of submission that appears in the texts as foot seizing. As was true for the written accounts of foot seizing, these figures appear most frequently in scenes of distant lands, rather than in scenes of tribute brought to the empire’s center, and they sometimes appear in a setting that suggests the tributaries are offering their rich goods to forestall an attack by the Assyrian military.

To Assyrian eyes the gestural distinctions between the prostrate tributary and the crouching tributary were probably significant. The posture and gesture of the prostrate tributary, corresponding to the foot seizing gesture described in texts, communicates a more intense submission, with a sense of urgency or even fear. If, in fact, it can be identified as a formal ritual of surrender to the Assyrian king, it may therefore represent the formulation or repairing of a relationship with Assyria. The crouching tributary with hand raised in the *laban appi* gesture, on the other hand, appears to be reinforcing an existing ceremonial relationship between the king and the foreign delegation.

Male Non-Assyrians as Captives

Compared with tributaries, the representations of non-Assyrian captives exhibit a much greater variety in Assyrian art, particularly in light of the fact that women are portrayed



14 Gates of Shalmaneser III, Balawat, band X, detail. London, Brit. Mus.



15 Palace gates, Balawat, band L1. London, Brit. Mus. (drawing : Marjorie Howard)

among the prisoners. Captives appear most frequently in three types of scenes: scenes of deportation, often in family groups and with their possessions; in files being reviewed by the Assyrian king (Fig. 15); and in the midst of the triumphal procession of the Assyrian army into Assyria (Figs. 20, 21).⁵¹

Many of the gestural attributes of tributaries described above appear in the representations of captives, including the stooped posture, the bend to the waist and knees, and the general visual impression of disorder. There are, however, fundamental distinctions between the image of the non-Assyrian as tributary and the image of the non-Assyrian as captive. The male captives represented in the two scenes from Ashurnasirpal's Throne Room are under guard and bound, with their arms drawn sharply behind their backs and tied with rope. The non-Assyrian who appears to be the highest ranking of the captives in the first scene—for he is positioned first and wears a long garment—is attended closely by the Assyrian foot soldier, who grasps him securely by the hair (Fig. 2).

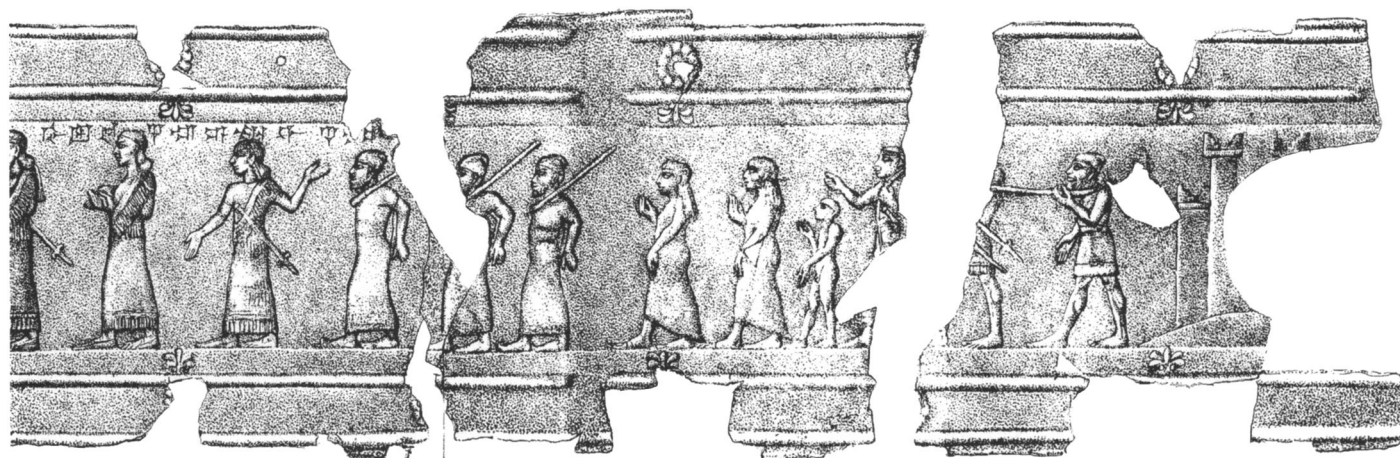
The choice to represent the captive leader held by the hair is ideologically charged, for male hair was considered an important attribute of virility in ancient Near Eastern society. The best-known example of male hair signifying masculinity and strength is that of Samson, whose vigor failed him after Delilah had him shorn while he slept.⁵² While no such illustrative anecdote has survived in Mesopotamian literature, there is ample evidence from Mesopotamia for hair as a conspicuous status marker, and even as a repository for identity. Some omen texts, for instance, indicate that hair from a petitioner's head and the hem of the garment can stand in for the individual in divination rituals.⁵³ Moreover, distinctive patterns of haircutting and shaving appear to have been used to communicate a man's status or occupation, from the degrading haircuts ordained for prisoners, criminals, and slaves to the ritual shaving used in the consecration of priests.⁵⁴ Thus, the representation of a high-ranking captive with his hair in the grasp of an Assyrian soldier was probably intended to communicate the emasculation of this Other, and perhaps to portend greater humiliation to come.

Although all of the prisoners represented in the larger-scale images from the palace of Ashurnasirpal are fully dressed, nudity is an attribute of many of the smaller-scale representations of male non-Assyrian prisoners on the Balawat palace



16 Stele fragment, Susa, southwestern Iran, ca. 2350 B.C.E. Paris, Musée du Louvre (photo: © Louvre)

gates (Fig. 15).⁵⁵ The nudity of prisoners of war is a long-standing tradition in Mesopotamian art, appearing as early as the art of Sumer and Akkad in the mid-third millennium B.C.E. (Fig. 16).⁵⁶ In Mesopotamian society, which esteemed urban life and its associated urbanity, clothing was considered to be a necessary attribute of a sophisticated person. Lack of clothing was associated with the antithesis of urbanity: rusticity, which carried connotations of wildness, stupidity, and amorality. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of the first stages in the transition of the hero Enkidu from a wild creature into a civilized human being was the wearing of clothing, given to him by a prostitute; he “became human. He put on clothing.”⁵⁷ The association between nudity and degradation for



17 Palace gates, Balawat, band R1. London, Brit. Mus. (drawing: Marjorie Howard)

women in particular is suggested by legal texts that prescribe the stripping and public display of women who have broken marital regulations.⁵⁸ Even sacred nudity—for we know that temple personnel are frequently depicted nude—could be a form of ritual abasement before the gods, perhaps with additional connotations of ritual purity.⁵⁹ Nudity may be related to death and mourning, as Gilgamesh appears to have removed his clothing in his mourning for Enkidu.⁶⁰ In addition to the shame and humiliation of being stripped of their clothing, however, I believe that the nudity of these prisoners communicates that they have been stripped of all of their possessions, including their weapons, for the Assyrian term for naked, *erû*, is also used idiomatically to indicate destitution.⁶¹

The bondage of these figures is also significant in terms of the way these images would have been interpreted by a contemporary audience. In addition to being represented with arms bound behind their backs and tied into a long file, foreign prisoners frequently appear wearing yokes (Fig. 17). The yoke imposed by the Assyrian king is by this period an ancient metaphor for his complete domination and control over non-Assyrians, one that connotes the dehumanization of the non-Assyrian captives by the analogy of their status with that of animals.⁶² When looking at these nude captives in bondage and thinking about the way they would have been seen through Assyrian eyes, we have to bear in mind that this was a highly militarized society. In their own biased literature and visual record, the Assyrians never lost a battle and rarely lost a man. Captivity alone would have been considered a grievous humiliation. Bondage and nudity would have raised this humiliation to the highest order.

Female Non-Assyrian Prisoners

Female prisoners are often featured in the same files of prisoners that were led before the Assyrian king (Figs. 17, 18, 21). Representations of non-Assyrian women raise different interpretive issues than do those of non-Assyrian men.⁶³ With very few exceptions, Assyrian women are conspicuously missing from the historical scenes that decorated Assyrian palaces, for curiously, almost every representation of a woman in Neo-Assyrian art is of a foreign woman.⁶⁴ This dearth of representations of Assyrian women raises two important

questions. The first is why: Why aren't there more images of Assyrian women in Assyrian art?⁶⁵ The second is how: How can we isolate salient features of the visual rhetoric of difference without the visual data that tell us what the Assyrians thought was normative (that is, Assyrian) for the appearance and behavior of women?

The former question is the most perplexing. The simplest response to this query is that there are no Assyrian women in Assyrian art because these narrative scenes are military in nature, and their settings, such as foreign towns, reviews of prisoners, and tribute, are those in which Assyrian women had no role. In other words, Assyrian narrative art focuses on a purely masculine domain, and the lack of images of Assyrian women is purely anecdotal. Such a facile explanation, however, fails to account for the presence in these images of non-Assyrian women, who, like their Assyrian counterparts, have no military function whatsoever. Moreover, it fails to consider the fact that these images are the end products of countless representational choices, not simply visual recordings of events as they unfolded. The inclusion of women among non-Assyrian prisoners (and on the walls of foreign towns under siege [Fig. 6]) is not anecdotal or arbitrary; it is an ideologically motivated choice, the significance of which will be addressed shortly.

The latter question is more easily resolved. The textual record does shed some light on the role of women in Assyrian society and in contemporary Near Eastern cultures. Gathering clues from a variety of textual and literary sources, I will attempt to interpret a few of the gestural attributes of the female, non-Assyrian prisoners of war in the art of Ashurnasirpal II. Because most of the foreign women mentioned as captives in the inscriptions of this reign are royal—wives and daughters of foreign rulers taken as prisoners—it is likely that the female prisoners in these images are royal as well. Unlike their male counterparts in Assyrian art, female prisoners are never bound, and they are never shown completely nude, although I will argue that their representations often involve exposure.

In an important scene from the Throne Room of Ashurnasirpal's Northwest Palace, the female captives wear long garments, and their heads are not covered (Fig. 18). They each raise one or two hands to their heads. The torso of the

woman at extreme left is represented frontally, and one of her breasts has been carefully articulated in relief.⁶⁶ In the virtual absence of comparative representations of Assyrian women, it is difficult to discern the meaning in the posture and gestures of these captive women. With the exception of similar representations of female prisoners of war and women on the walls of besieged cities, I know of no illuminating visual or literary correlates for these gestures in Mesopotamian art or language. The gesture of hands raised to the head has been variously described as “hair tearing” and mourning, based in part on evidence from other ancient Mediterranean cultures. In the second book of Samuel, for instance, Tamar, having been raped by her brother Amnon, places her hand on her head in what is understood as a display of mourning and shame.⁶⁷ In addition, the Egyptian hieroglyph and representational convention for mourning is a woman with her hand raised to her head—sometimes even placing ashes on the head—in precisely the same gesture associated with the foreign women represented in the art of Assyria (Fig. 19).⁶⁸

A number of the female prisoners shown on the Balawat palace gates make a more enigmatic gesture (Fig. 21). These women have their skirts lifted in the front to reveal their legs, some as high as the knee. The images are not always entirely clear in their rendering of the hands of these figures, and it is difficult to determine whether these women are represented actually holding up their skirts with their hands or wearing skirts that are somehow shortened or bound up in the front. For the purposes of this ideological argument, however, such a distinction is not important. The significant feature of these women is their *exposure*.

From a purely pragmatic perspective, gathering the skirt in one hand and holding it high in the front allows greater ease of movement, particularly in the context of what was probably a forced march. If purely utilitarian concerns accounted for the raised garments, however, every woman represented as a prisoner of war would display this gesture, rather than those from selected groups. I believe, then, that this skirt-raising gesture is more significant. I will argue that these non-Assyrian, presumably royal, women are deliberately represented in an aspect that would have appeared immodest to Assyrian eyes.

At our great remove, and with such a reticent cultural record, it is difficult for us to determine what would have looked immodest to Assyrians. Our twentieth-century eyes are rather accustomed to the revelation of women's flesh; in terms of exposure there are few taboos. To us, a glimpse of an ankle or calf scarcely signifies anything at all. But we do not have to delve very far into our cultural past to find an age in which the mysteries of the female body were more closely guarded. In Victorian England and nineteenth-century France, for instance, representations of a woman exposing an ankle or leg were highly significant. Fashionably dressed women showing their boot tops in Parisian cafés or the streets of London were without question being represented as women of easy virtue (Fig. 22).⁶⁹ Respectable women, women who were represented as dutiful wives, mothers, and daughters, appeared in the art of the period wearing flowing skirts that came to the floor (Fig. 23).⁷⁰

In such images as those of female non-Assyrian prisoners

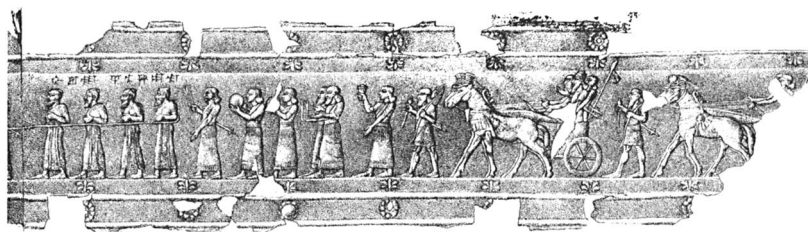


18 Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Room B (Throne Room), slab 5 lower, detail. London, Brit. Mus.

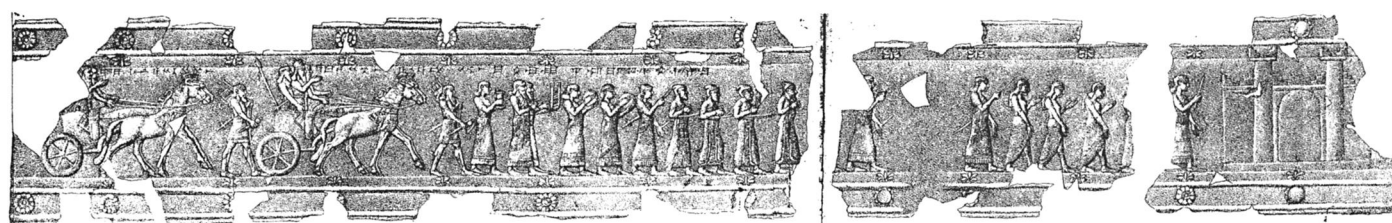


19 Egyptian grieving gesture, Coffin of Ahmose, Thebes, Dynasty 18. New York, Metropolitan Museum, Gift of the Earl of Carnarvon

and nineteenth-century urban streetwalkers, the tiny stretch of exposed leg becomes highly charged, an important component of a visual language that communicates the sexual availability of the whole of the female body. This comparison is in no way intended to suggest that attitudes toward the female body or sexuality in Assyria mirrored those of Western Europe in the nineteenth century. Rather, the analogy is a response to those who would look at the skirt-raising gesture of the foreign women in Assyrian art and discount its significance as sexual revelation because no explicitly sexualized anatomy—that is, indisputably naked breasts and genitalia—is depicted. In the art of Assyria, as in that of Victorian England, I believe that the exposure of female flesh, even limited exposure of “innocent” legs and ankles, participates in the signification of sexual availability and immodesty. The eroticization of the female body in many of these images is



20 Palace gates, Balawat, band L4, fragment. London, Brit. Mus. (drawing: Marjorie Howard)



21 Palace gates, Balawat, band R4. London, Brit. Mus. (drawing: Marjorie Howard)



22 *The Haymarket—Midnight*, wood engraving, from Henry Mayhew, ed., *London Labour and the London Poor*, 1862

augmented by the exaggerated rendering of the breasts of a number of the captives.⁷¹

The suggestion that the raised skirts of these foreign women in Assyrian art signify their exposure and, as such, their humiliation and debasement, is well supported by Assyrian texts. A series of fragmentary law texts from the Middle Assyrian period indicate that clothing and its lack were important cultural signifiers in slightly earlier Assyrian society. One law in particular stated that married women were to have their heads covered when they appeared in public, whereas prostitutes were not permitted to cover their heads.⁷² We can imagine that similar guidelines, now lost, could have applied to other features of women's dress and behavior. In this context, the depiction of women with their legs exposed renders both the transgression of the Other and their humiliation.

Perhaps more telling for the status of the female prisoners is a passage in a fragmentary ninth-century composition that describes a campaign of the Assyrian king in Urartu, north of



23 George Elgar Hicks, *Woman's Mission: Companion of Manhood*, 1863. London, The Tate Gallery

Assyria. Following the account of the battle, the king boasts: "I paraded the women of his land before my troops."⁷³ The remainder of the text details the massacre of enemy soldiers and the destruction of enemy property. In light of the fact that women are singled out for display in this account, it seems likely that such a display would have been understood in sexual terms. This text, with its description of a procession of female prisoners, corresponds to a type of scene frequently found on the bronze gate bands of Ashurnasirpal: the

triumphal procession of the Assyrian army into Assyrian towns, with prisoners of war driven before the royal chariots (Figs. 20, 21).

The inappropriateness and humiliation of such a sexual display by patrician women of the first millennium B.C.E. is also reflected in the invective against Babylon in the book of Isaiah (47:1–3), which is cast in terms of a diatribe against its idle noblewomen:

Down with you! Sit in the dust, virgin, daughter of Babylon. Sit on the ground, dethroned, daughter of the Chaldeans. Never again will you be called tender and delicate. Take the millstones, grind the meal. *Remove the veil, tie up your skirts, uncover your legs.* Wade through rivers. *Let your nakedness be seen, and your shame exposed* [emphasis added].

This text refers specifically to the raising of skirts and exposure of legs, and indicates clearly that in the ancient Near East this act was associated with the diminution of social status, the loss of modesty, and the engendering of shame.

The exposure of women plays a role in a judicial context in Mesopotamia. One method of enacting a divorce entailed the husband cutting off the “hem”—a term that is often synonymous with lap—of the wife/divorcée’s garment, and a substantial portion of the garment with it.⁷⁴ Moreover, additional texts stipulate that if a wife commits an offense such as rejecting her husband and taking another man, she is to be stripped naked, driven from her home, and in one case displayed on the roof of the palace.⁷⁵ In these cases, revealing women’s flesh was a symbolic act that operated multivalently. It was a means of degradation, a conspicuous display of their change in status, and an indication of the forfeiture of their property.

The representations of non-Assyrian female captives with raised skirts, therefore, communicate more than simply the facilitation of walking. While these women are not revealing themselves in a sexually explicit manner—that is, they are not actually “showing anything”—we must remember that these representations were, after all, created for display in a public, official setting. This gesture appears to be one of sexually implicit exposure, a revelation of a small part of the female body that stood for the eroticized whole. As such, exposure was associated in contemporary texts with impropriety, humiliation, and destitution; in the visual record it apparently signified the sexual availability of these women to the Assyrian male viewer.⁷⁶

Non-Assyrians in Combat

The most common and lurid of all representations of non-Assyrians in Assyrian art are those featured in battle scenes. While these depictions of military engagements appear to be somewhat chaotic, they are in fact carefully structured and choreographed representations of the chaos of battle. The royal inscriptions indicate that within the Assyrian belief system, anyone who refused to surrender and actually engaged the Assyrian army fell into one of the following categories: outrageously rebellious and therefore in need of punishment; insane; or subhuman. The presence, then, of non-Assyrians within the context of a battle scene, the very



24 Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Room B (Throne Room), slab 11 upper. London, Brit. Mus.

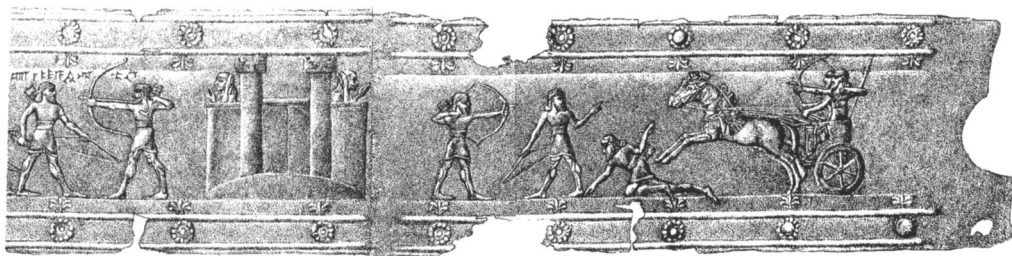
fact that they have resisted sensible Assyrian attempts at conquest (deliverance, advancement), already characterizes foreigners in a negative manner.⁷⁷

Assyrian depictions of their battles with non-Assyrians are extremely biased. The outcome of these struggles is never in question, for the Assyrians are depicted as masterful warriors who easily vanquish their ineffective, and sometimes even cowardly opponents. While some of the foreign soldiers from the walls of the Throne Room of the Northwest Palace and the Balawat palace gates defend their towns and fortresses valiantly, many others stand defenseless, plead for mercy, or even try to run away (Figs. 24, 25).⁷⁸ In the eyes of the Assyrians, whose society was steeped in military discipline, the passive, cowardly behavior of these non-Assyrians would have appeared inexcusably craven.

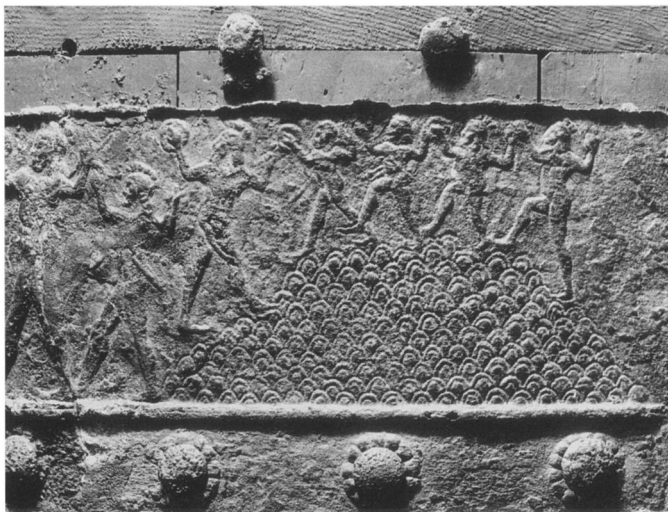
Is the denigration of the enemy’s military skills a necessary, or even a natural way to propagandize? Other cultures use more positive visual and verbal language when describing the military powers of their enemies, in an effort to aggrandize their defeat of such a worthy opponent. For instance, in Homer’s description of the Trojan War, which is clearly a product of a different context and created for a different purpose and audience, Paris is characterized as having a godlike and fearsome appearance that inspired even greater bellicosity in Menelaus.⁷⁹ Assyrian ideology, however, did not in this period allow for the ascription of positive qualities to military and political adversaries. If the purpose of these images is to instruct viewers and forestall rebellion, then there can never be the slightest doubt about the outcome of the conflict. In such a context, the notion of a worthy opponent is oxymoronic.

Many of the foreigners who do not appear to be fighting strenuously are shown with the same hand gesture. These figures raise their arm, with their hand, palm outward, before them. The soldiers who make this gesture are also frequently shown holding their bows in a lowered position with the string on top, a position from which they could not be used readily (Figs. 24, 25).⁸⁰ The consistency with which this identical posture and gesture are represented suggests that this type of figure may have signified something specific.

My analysis of the posture and gesture associated with representations of the captives and tributaries has suggested certain analogies between postures assumed during prayer to the gods and those assumed by non-Assyrians in the presence of the dominant Assyrians. Perhaps it is relevant to the



25 Palace gates, Balawat, band R7, detail. London, Brit. Mus. (drawing: Marjorie Howard)



26 Gates of Shalmaneser III, Balawat, band II, detail. London, Brit. Mus. (from King, pl. xii)

attempt to interpret the palm-outward gesture that an Assyrian phrase used for supplication, *upnī petû*, translates literally as “to open the fist.”⁸¹ As the textual attestations of this phrase nearly all date at least a century after the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, the gesture shown in the reliefs may not be literally the visual rendering of *upnī petû*. It is possible, however, that the phrase and the gesture stem from similar cultural stimuli. I suggest that the raised, open palms of these foreigners reflect the intensified, urgent begging that is associated in the texts with the *upnī petû* gesture. We do not know if this raised hand represents a formal gesture of surrender or if it is a representational choice that indicates that the foreigners were militarily incompetent, outmatched, and forced to beg for mercy. We do know that to the eyes of the Assyrians, these begging, pleading soldiers could have been a clear indication of foreign military ineffectiveness and of Assyrian military superiority. Death is imminent and unavoidable for these figures. It appears as the natural consequence of their ineffectiveness as well as of their cowardly pose.

The lowered and sometimes even dropped bow of many of these foreigners is a gesture that communicates not only their lack of discipline but also their proximity to death. Assyrian archers are in every instance depicted holding their bows firmly—either in immediate use with an arrow to the string or carried slung over the shoulder, with the string to the back in a position that would allow it to be used quickly. While I know of no Akkadian expression or idiom that correlates to this

observation, the consistency with which non-Assyrians are represented with their bows lowered or lost—in nearly every depiction of combat—suggests that the loss of essential military equipment by these non-Assyrian soldiers or the lowering of the bow to a position that detracts from its potential usefulness represent more than simply a narrative anecdote. The trope of the soldier with useless or dropped equipment is employed most commonly as part of the visual shorthand in the scenes on the Balawat palace gates.⁸² Many epithets of Ashurnasirpal II and other Assyrian kings refer to the rulers as weapons, and one of the instruments of awe wielded by Ashurnasirpal II in his annals was his “lordly weapons.”⁸³ In Ashurnasirpal’s sculptures, the bow appears frequently in the hands of the king as an emblem of his military supremacy and political power. Moreover, in other ancient western Asian cultures, the bow appears in literature as a metaphor for potency—political, military, even sexual.⁸⁴ To Assyrian eyes, then, the dropping of the bow may have sent messages about the lack of virility of the enemies as well.

As was the case for tributaries and captives, Assyrian art did not treat all representations of foreigners in battle equally. The gestures and postures of non-Assyrians from the land of Urartu on the bronze bands from the palace gates of Balawat created in the reigns of Ashurnasirpal and his son Shalmaneser stand out in the art of the ninth century B.C.E. (Fig. 26).⁸⁵ Unlike every other battle depicted on the bronze bands of Ashurnasirpal II, the Urartean scene on a band from the Mamu Temple refers not to the battle for a fortified town but a battle for a mountain. While, on the one hand, the inclusion of topographical detail (mountains) in these scenes was a means of referring to a specific, exotic, foreign context,⁸⁶ I believe that the lack of association with cities in the portrayal of these non-Assyrians was certainly intended to signify their lack of “civilization.” In addition, their behavior, posture, gesture, and costume identify them as the most emphatically outlandish, different, and non-Assyrian of all non-Assyrians represented in this reign. All wear crested helmets, but some of the figures dating from the reign of Ashurnasirpal appear to be nude—certainly unusual and, one would think, impractical for an army engaged in combat. Instead of the militarily superior bow and arrow, they wield spears, which defines them as being technologically inferior to the Assyrians. They run pell-mell down the slopes of their mountain toward the Assyrians, with their knees lifted and waving their arms high in the air. The antithesis of the Assyrian army in action, they are the strangest of all the non-Assyrian Others appearing in this reign. Although they appear to be easily defeated by the more composed and disciplined Assyrian army, they ulti-

mately would prove one of the most powerful of all the enemies of Assyria.

A few conclusions can be drawn from this examination of the gestural and postural differences between representations of Assyrians and non-Assyrians in the art of the early Assyrian Empire. I have shown that gestures that are consistently and exclusively associated with representations of non-Assyrians can be interpreted through the use of literary references to gestures in contexts that convey their significance, and by comparison to idiomatic expressions involving the human body. This type of textual comparison is intended to suggest not that these representations of postures or gestures are direct illustrations of the phrases in question but that the visual and verbal idioms were generated within the same cultural milieu. These texts, in other words, help us to interpret the manner in which the images of gestures would have been understood by a contemporary audience.

Gesture is clearly a powerful visual means of reinforcing cultural values regarding identity and difference, and in particular of expressing the alterity, or otherness, of non-Assyrians. In contrast to the skillful and dominating Assyrian army, the cowardly foreign soldiers raise their hands to plead for their lives while their weapons lie useless. In contrast to the discipline and dignity communicated through the upright posture and restrained demeanor of the Assyrian king and his court, foreign captives are stripped, bound like animals, and often bent over, while tributaries crouch in subjugation, with their fists raised in a gesture of abject humility. Foreign women tear their hair in mourning, and their alterity and transgression are expressed through the shame incumbent on their exposed flesh. Through the representation of foreign men and women in inappropriate and even immoral postures and gestures, the Assyrians could in effect justify their violent conquest and annexation of these lands. These foreigners don't know how to act properly; they are crying out for the "civilizing" intervention of Assyrian might.

The gestures that express the cultural difference of non-Assyrians are placed in a narrative context that illustrates the negative consequences of the violation of Assyrian social and moral codes—humiliation, defeat, and mutilation. The representations of the punishment and humiliation of those who—through their gestures—have been highlighted as being out of step with Assyrian values served to reinforce positively Assyrian identity, to encourage conformity in the Assyrian centers, and to advocate the maintenance of existing power structures.

Megan Cifarelli received her Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1995. She is currently at work on a book about the representation of cultural difference in the art of Ashurnasirpal II [43 Willow Avenue, Pelham, New York 10803–1019].

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Notes

1. This is not to say that narrative art was introduced to Assyria in this period, for there is considerable evidence for a continuous narrative tradition in Assyria in both paintings that decorated palaces and small-scale relief sculptures. See, for example, the narrative scene in relief on a "symbol stand" from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, 1243–1207 B.C.E., excavated in the Assyrian cult center of Ashur, in Walter Andrae, *Die jüngeren Ishtar-Tempel in Assur*, *Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft*, vol. 58 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1935), pl. 29. Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 B.C.E.) in particular claims to have decorated his palace with his "royal deeds," very likely an allusion to a painted program of historical scenes; A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennium BC (to 1115 BC)*, *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods*, vol. 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), A.O.87.10, lines 75–78.
2. For the history of Assyria see Horst Klengel, "The History of Ashur in the Third and Second Millennium B.C.E.," in *Assyrian Origins*, ed. P. O. Harper et al. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995); *Cambridge Ancient History*, 3d ed., vol. 2, pt. 2 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 443–81, and vol. 3, pt. 1, 1982, 238–440; William A. Ward and Martha Sharp Joukowsky, eds., *The Crisis Years: The 12th Century B.C.E.* (Dubuque, Ia.: Kendall/Hunt, 1992).
3. The modern reading of the reign of Ashurnasirpal II as marking the inception of "empire" in Assyria is flawed on a number of counts. Ashurnasirpal ascended to the throne of Assyria at a time when Assyria itself was militarily and culturally ascendant, and in many respects his reign is a continuation of patterns established by his predecessors. Moreover, we are at the mercy of the chance nature of archaeological discovery: we simply have a much larger body of evidence at our disposal from the reign of Ashurnasirpal than from any of his immediate predecessors. There is, however, little doubt as to the role of Ashurnasirpal as founder of a new, grandiose capital at Nimrud, and few would dispute that his reign witnessed the introduction of the medium of stone relief orthostats for the decoration of monumental Assyrian buildings.
4. The literature on the reliefs from the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal is extensive. The reliefs are catalogued in Janusz Meuszynski, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalhu (Nimrud)*, vol. 1, *Baghdader Forschungen*, vol. 2 (Mainz: P. v. Zabern, 1981); and in Paley and Sobolewski, 1987, 1992. For interpretive essays, see Samuel Paley, *King of the World: Ashur-nasir-pal II of Assyria, 883–859 B.C.E.* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1976); Julian Edgeworth Reade, "Texts and Sculptures from the Northwest Palace, Nimrud," *Iraq* 47 (1985): 206; and for the Throne Room program, see Irene Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 2–38.
5. The huge wooden gates erected at major entrances to Assyrian palaces and temples were often decorated with strips of bronze that had been embossed with narrative scenes and inscribed. The two extant sets of gate bands from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II discovered at the provincial center of Balawat, northeast of Nimrud, provide a corpus of representations of foreigners that is very important because, unlike the palace reliefs, they bear cuneiform captions identifying their subject matter. Those associated with Ashurnasirpal's palace at Balawat are in the collection of the British Museum, while those associated with the Mamu Temple at Balawat are in the Mosul Museum in Iraq. Only a small number of these bands are published; for full

descriptions of them, see Cifarelli, app. B. These gates will be published in their entirety in a forthcoming volume, R. D. Barnett et al., *The Bronze Gates of Ashurnasirpal II*.

6. I am using the word *narrative* in the sense outlined by Whitney Davis, *Masking the Blow: The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 234–55, that is, as “the discursive ‘relating’—of a transition from one state of affairs to another” (237). Defined as such, this term applies equally to the depiction of a single event as to that of a series of linked events, and equally to mythological or “imagined” events as to “real” or historical events. This understanding of narrative is at odds with that proposed by other scholars of ancient art, such as G. A. Gaballa, *Narrative in Egyptian Art* (Mainz: P. v. Zabern, 1977), who stipulates that narratives be historically accurate. Following Davis’s definition, single scenes depicting files of tributaries bearing goods to the Assyrian king—which relate the transfer of property from one polity to another—are as legitimately considered to be “narrative” as are sequential scenes of the Assyrian king riding forth into battle, laying siege to a foreign town, and executing prisoners of war.

7. For enlightening discussions of decorative programs in Assyrian palaces and monuments, see Winter (as in n. 4); John Malcolm Russell, “Bulls for the Palace and Order in the Empire: The Sculptural Program of Sennacherib’s Court VI at Nineveh,” *Art Bulletin* 69, no. 4 (1987): 520–39; Michelle Marcus, “Geography as an Organizing Principle in the Imperial Art of Shalmaneser III,” *Iraq* 49 (1987): 77–90; and Julian Edgeworth Reade, “Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art,” in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires, Mesopotamia*, vol. 7, ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk, 1979), 329–43; and idem, “Neo-Assyrian Monuments in Their Historical Context,” in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons in Literary, Ideological and Historical Analysis*, *Oriens Antiqui Collectio*, vol. 17, ed. Frederick Mario Fales (Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente, Centro per la antichità e la storia dell’arte del vicino Oriente, 1981), 143–68.

8. A more thorough examination of the use of ideology as a critical tool can be found in Michelle Marcus, “Art and Ideology in Ancient Western Asia,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 4, ed. Jack M. Sasson (New York: Scribner, 1995), 2487–505; and Cifarelli, 9–13. The literature dealing with ideology and the ideological interpretation of art and literature is enormous. Most useful for my purposes were Louis Althusser, “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus (Notes towards an Investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: New Left Books, 1971), 121–73; Mario Liverani, “Memorandum on the Approach to Historiographic Texts,” *Orientalia*, n.s., 42 (1973): 178–94; Liverani, 1979; Winter (as in n. 4); and idem, “After the Battle Is Over: The Stele of the Vultures and the Beginning of Historical Narrative in the Art of the Ancient Near East,” in *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Herbert Kessler and Marianna Shreve Simpson, *Studies in the History of Art*, vol. 16 (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1985), 11–32.

9. Irene Winter, “Art as Evidence for Interaction: Relations between the Assyrian Empire and North Syria,” in *Mesopotamien und Seine Nachbarn*, ed. Hans Nissen and Johannes Renger (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1982), 356–57.

10. Although Ashurnasirpal did not explicitly state that he used prisoners of war in the construction of his new capital, it is suggested by a range of evidence. Ashurnasirpal records the capture of tens of thousands of prisoners of war in the course of his annual campaigns, and in several instances the inscriptions state that the prisoners were brought to Nimrud. The imposition of corvée labor on a defeated population is also mentioned frequently in the campaign accounts. See Cifarelli, 138–228, for a comprehensive analysis of this evidence. The use of a captive work force is amply documented in the visual and verbal records of subsequent Assyrian kings; see, for example, Russell (as in n. 7).

11. Liverani, 305, characterizes this system as a “theory of diversity as justification of unbalance and of exploitation [emphasis added].” He has developed a framework based on the distinction between the *static* and *dynamic* aspects of the expression of ideology, the former being the representation of the world (e.g., the strangeness of non-Assyrian lands and people), and the latter being the representation of interaction between the parties (e.g., the massacre of foreign peoples).

12. There is no evidence from the reign of Ashurnasirpal for the codification of the power of the Assyrian court, because no official correspondence has survived. The relative frequency of uprisings and coups d’état within the court in the reigns of his successors suggests the considerable power wielded by this group, as does the decay of Shalmaneser III’s power near the end of his reign; see Julian Edgeworth Reade, “The History of Assyria,” in Harper et al. (as in n. 2), 25. I have argued that one of the reasons that the audience in this period was limited to the Assyrian court is that Assyria does not appear to have yet established the extensive diplomatic network that would characterize the Assyrian Empire a century later. If the content of the royal inscriptions can be taken as a reliable indication of the official priorities and interests of the reign, then it is significant that in the early Neo-Assyrian period the royal inscriptions describe Assyrian interaction with foreigners in primarily military terms. The inscriptions record that, with remarkably few exceptions, the tribute and tax demanded by the Assyrian king were not brought to the palace and presented to the king by envoys but collected by the king en route during the annual military campaigns. Moreover, the official Assyrian records show that Ashurnasirpal would “conquer” a region, demand tribute and taxes, and

appoint a governor, only to return in a subsequent year to “conquer” the region again. Even in the absence of Ashurnasirpal’s administrative archives, these features of his text suggest a preoccupation with military matters that eclipsed diplomacy and provincial administration. During the course of the Assyrian Empire that emerged in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C.E., the royal inscriptions would change to include descriptions of contact through diplomacy and provincial administration. See Cifarelli, 43–46.

13. Russell (as in n. 7); Simo Parpola, “The Murderer of Sennacherib,” in *Death in Mesopotamia*, Mesopotamia, no. 8, ed. B. Alster (Copenhagen: Akademisk, 1979), 171–82; D. J. Wiseman, “Murder in Mesopotamia,” *Iraq* 36 (1974): 249–52; A. Leo Oppenheim, “Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires,” in *Propaganda and Communication in World History*, vol. 1, *The Symbolic Instrument in Early Times*, ed. H. Lasswell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1979), 111–44; Wilfred Lambert, “The Reigns of Shalmaneser III and Ashurnasirpal II: An Interpretation,” *Iraq* 36 (1974): 104–5.

14. Ashurnasirpal had revived the Middle Assyrian practice of mass deportation, that is, the removal of defeated populations from their homelands and their subsequent relocation within the Assyrian domain. His followers would execute this plan on an enormous scale, and by the end of the 8th century B.C.E., deportation policy had resulted in a major demographic shift in the Assyrian capitals, with peoples from the western reaches of the empire constituting a majority. For deportations, see Bustany Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1979).

15. For the phenomenon of the Aramaization of Assyria, see Hayim Tadmor, “The Aramaization of Assyria: Aspects of Western Impact,” 449–70, and Paul Garelli, “Importance et rôle des Araméens dans l’administration de l’empire assyrien,” 437–48, in Nissen and Renger (as in n. 9).

16. The letter is quoted in the introduction of Simo Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part One, Letters from Assyria and the West*, State Archives of Assyria, vol. 1 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1987), xvi.

17. Captions range from single lines identifying foreign towns and peoples, such as those appearing on the bronze gates of Ashurnasirpal and Shalmaneser III (Fig. 6), to the fragments of narrative and dialogue provided in the battle scenes from the reign of Ashurbanipal, particularly the Battle of Til Tuba. See Pamela Gerardi, “Epigraphs and Assyrian Palace Reliefs: The Development of Epigraphic Texts,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 40, no. 1 (1988): 1–35.

18. For the most comprehensive analysis of the ethnographic information presented in Assyrian reliefs see Markus Wäfler, *Nicht-Assyrischer neuassyrischer Darstellungen*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, vol. 26 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975).

19. On this topic see Liverani, 309–11; also Carlo Zaccagnini, “The Enemy in Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: The Ethnographic Description,” 409–24, and Frederick Mario Fales, “The Enemy in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: The Moral Judgment,” 425–35, in Nissen and Renger (as in n. 9); for the reign of Ashurnasirpal in particular, see Cifarelli, 171–227.

20. In particular, the descriptions of the atrocities that the Assyrians visited on their conquered foes, such as impalings and beheadings, were couched in language that evokes punishments within the Assyrian judicial system. See Cifarelli, 215–27.

21. The study of gesture appears in the literature of anthropology, linguistics, psychology, and, more recently, cultural and intellectual history. The most useful synopses of the issues surrounding the study of gesture can be found in Keith Thomas, introduction to *A Cultural History of Gesture*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 1–14; and Adam Kendon, “Some Reasons for Studying Gesture,” *Semiotica* 62 (1986): 3–28.

22. David Efron, *Gesture, Race and Culture* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972).

23. Gruber; and Meir Malul, *Studies in Mesopotamian Legal Symbolism*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, vol. 221 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988). I am grateful to Jack Sasson for the second reference. Also, for the elucidation of a number of idioms and symbolic acts involving parts of the body, see A. Leo Oppenheim, “Idiomatic Accadian,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 61 (1941): 251–71; and Ann Kilmer Draffkorn, “Symbolic Gestures in Akkadian Contracts from Alalakh and Ugarit,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94 (1974): 177–83.

24. Representations of tributaries appear on the decoration of the relatively public courtyard E-D outside Throne Room B, and in the western wing in the Northwest Palace; see Paley and Sobolewski, 1992, pl. 4; and idem, 1987, pl. 5. Tributaries also appear on a number of the bands from Balawat: bands L2 (Cifarelli, fig. 36), R2, and R5 (both unpublished; for descriptions, see Cifarelli, app. B) of the palace gates, and L1 (Joan Oates, “Balawat: Recent Excavations and a New Gate,” in *Essays on Near Eastern Art and Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson*, ed. Prudence O. Harper and Holly Pittman [New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983], fig. 5), R1 and R2 (John Curtis, “Balawat,” in *Fifty Years of Mesopotamian Discovery* [London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1982], fig. 86), and L2, R2, L3, R3, L4, R4, L5, R5, L8, and R8 (all unpublished; for descriptions, see Cifarelli, app. B) of the Mamu Temple.

25. The militarism of this society is evidenced by the almost obsessive attention to military detail in royal texts and art. The degree of social control that dominated Assyrian palace society is illustrated by a series of documents from the Middle Assyrian period known as the palace edicts. These inscriptions stipulate heinous penalties, such as death and mutilation, for seemingly

minor breaches of court etiquette. For example, a man who accepted a gift from a palace woman stood to lose his nose and ears, in A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1972), 683. For these edicts, see Ernst Weidner, "Hof- und Harems-Erlasses assyrische Königes aus dem 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 17 (1954–56): 257–93. I have argued elsewhere that these texts, although somewhat earlier, are relevant to the discussion of the reign of Ashurnasirpal because of the many archaic features of his reign. See Cifarelli, 43, 102.

26. See David Kunzle, *Fashion and Fetishism: The Social History of the Corset, Tight-Lacing, and Other Forms of Body-Sculpture in the West* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), 115–18. Michelle Marcus, in "Adornment and Conceptions of the Male Body in Western Iran" (I am grateful to Michelle Marcus for providing me with a copy of this forthcoming article), considers the role of personal adornment for Assyrian men and men from Hasanlu in northwestern Iran, specifically the wearing of wide belts, in achieving the posture depicted in Assyrian reliefs. According to Marcus, the attainment of this posture is part of the construction of masculinity in the Assyrian Empire and was emulated by the elite males of Hasanlu.

27. Benjamin Foster, "Dialogue between Aššurbanipal and Nabû," in *Before the Muses*, vol. 2 (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 1993), 727–28; the translation is from Alisdair Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, State Archives of Assyria, vol. 3 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), 33–35, lines 7–8, 12, *a-di ša-at UD-me ĠIR.2.MEŠ-ka la is-sa-na-ma-a... a-mat-ta SAG-ka ú-šat-taš la-an-ke*.

28. Oppenheim (as in n. 23), 252.

29. CAD, A, pt. 1, s.v. *alaktu*, 297. Meaning (1) is "gait"; e.g., in a Babylonian text it appears, "if he walks with the gait of a god . . . the gait of a duck . . ." Meaning (2) is "correct behavior, customary way"; e.g., the epithet of Shalmaneser I, "whose ways (*al-ka-ka-tu-šu*) are exceedingly pleasing to Aššur," in Grayson (as in n. 1), A.O. 77.1, lines 8–9). The plural form "heroic ways" appears within Ashurnasirpal II's own inscription as *il-ka-kāt*, in Grayson, 1991, A.O. 101.1, ii, line 6, in the description of a stele. See CAD, I, s.v. *ilkaḫāti*, 73.

30. Foster (as in n. 27), 500, lines 12–15.

31. According to Gruber, 171, rather than "to kneel," as in CAD, K, s.v. *kaṁāsu*, 118b, to supplicate, beseech, submit.

32. *Šapālu rešu*, see CAD, Š, s.v. *šapālu* (1)d.

33. For *kanāšu kišada*, see CAD, K, s.v. *kanāšu* (1), (5), (7), 144–47; *kišada*, 447. Gruber, 178, also observes that *kanāšu*, literally, to bow down and figuratively, to submit, originates in a royal context—that is, it conveys submission to the king, and its use later migrates into the sacral sphere, where it refers to a prostration before the gods.

34. *ĠU elā tušaknaš raggiš*, from a text from Sippar, cited in CAD, K, *kanāšu* (1), 144.

35. Gruber, 313–20.

36. Ursula Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen: Aspekte der Herrschaft*, Baghdader Forschungen, vol. 9 (Mainz: P. v. Zabern, 1986), type IIIa, "König mit verschränkten Händen," 40–45, pls. 6, 2–8. For an example of earlier royal representations—from the late 3rd and early 2nd millennium B.C.E.—with precisely the same posture and gesture, see Winfried Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (Berlin: Propyläon, 1975), figs. 53–57, 172.

37. This gesture is associated with the representations of tributaries from courtyard E-D (Paley and Sobolewski, 1992, pl. 4), as well as panel WFL 21b of the Northwest Palace (Paley and Sobolewski, 1987, pl. 5). On Ashurnasirpal's palace gates from Balawat, the last tributary from Sarug-x on band L2 (Cifarelli, fig. 36) and the first two from x-g-x on band R2 are represented making this gesture. On the Mamu Temple bands, the leader of the tributaries from Azamu, whose higher rank is suggested by his longer, more elaborate costume, and many of the tributaries from Suḫu are depicted with raised fists as well; see Oates (as in n. 24), fig. 5; and Curtis (as in n. 24), fig. 86.

38. See Julian Edgeworth Reade, "Shikaf-ti Gulgul: Its Date and Significance," *Iranica Antiqua* 12 (1977): 34. CAD, L, s.v. *labānu* B, (1)a, defines this verb as "to humiliate, or humble," with the connotation of the object begging the gods for mercy, 11. It occurs always in conjunction with the word *appu*, or nose. Magen (as in n. 36), 45–54, 96–100, restricts the use of the term *laban appi* to the description of a royal gesture and to a group of later Assyrian monuments that clearly depict the king holding up his fist with the thumb emphatically raised. Another metaphor for humiliation involving the nose appears in the reign of the Middle Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I, who claims to have attached nose ropes to captive kings, *ina ap-pi-šu-nu ki-ma GU₄ š[er-r]e-ta at-ta-di* (Grayson, 1991, A.O. 87.2, lines 26–27).

39. For the inscriptions, see CAD, L, s.v. *labānu* B, (1)b.

40. Irene Winter has pointed out to me in conversation that there is a Sumerian expression for greeting that involves bringing the hand to the nose. While the Assyrian expression might ultimately derive from this Sumerian precedent, I would argue that the nature of the *relationship* of the supplicant to the deity that is associated with *laban appi* in an Assyrian context implies not simply greeting but ritual humiliation.

41. Grayson, 1991, A.O. 101.1, i, line 81, *ma-a ḥa-da-at du-ku ma-a ḥa-da-at bal-lī ma-a ḥa-da-at šā ŠA-ka-ni e-pu-uš*.

42. The dating and significance of the White Obelisk are topics too complex and controversial to be addressed in this article. While it is often dated as early as the reign of the 11th-century B.C.E. Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I, there are a number of convincing arguments that place the monument in the very earliest years of Ashurnasirpal II's reign. For discussion of this debate, see

Julian Edgeworth Reade, "Ashurnasirpal I and the White Obelisk," *Iraq* 37 (1975): 129–50; and Holly Pittman, "The White Obelisk and the Problem of Historical Narrative in the Art of Assyria," *Art Bulletin* 78, no. 2 (June 1996).

43. All of Assyria was under the threat of Aramaean incursions in this period, but the text in question mentions the "fortress of Nineveh" in the context of a list of areas ravaged by the Aramaeans, suggesting that Nineveh or its environs briefly fell to the Aramaeans; see A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1975), Assyrian Chronicle Fragment 4, 189.

44. Cifarelli, 184–89.

45. Such is the case not only in the reign of Ashurnasirpal, whose courtyard E-D was the most public area of his palace (Paley and Sobolewski, 1992, pl. 4), but of the later kings as well. In the late 8th century B.C.E., Facade n of the Palace of Sargon at Khorsabad was decorated with large-scale processions of tributaries bringing goods to Sargon; see Pauline Albenda, *The Palace of Sargon, King of Assyria* (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1986), pls. 16–25.

46. Paley and Sobolewski, unpublished paper. I am grateful to Samuel Paley for providing me with a copy of this manuscript, an abstract of which is available in the proceedings of the 39th Rencontre Assyriologique, *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten: XXXIX Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale Heidelberg*, 6.–10. Juli 1992 (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, 1997).

47. For a discussion of the Chinese tributary system, see Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th–14th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 3.

48. One of the tributaries from Phoenicia on an unpublished bronze band from the gate of Ashurnasirpal's Mamu Temple at Balawat is partially prostrated. Many prostrate figures appear on monuments of Shalmaneser III, including tributaries from Gilzānu and Israel in panels A1 and A2 of the Black Obelisk (Marcus [as in n. 7], pl. xxii) and band X of Shalmaneser III's Balawat gates (King, pl. LVII); for prostrate tributaries from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, see Richard D. Barnett and Margaret Falkner, *The Sculptures of Ashurnasirpal II, Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.E.) and Esarhaddon (681–669) from the Central and Southwest Palaces of Nimrud* (London: British Museum, 1962), pls. lxxxiv, lxxxv.

49. This phrase is rendered in Akkadian *ĠIR.II (šēpu) sabātu*; for example, see Grayson, 1991, A.O. 101.1, iii, line 69.

50. Cifarelli, 209–12.

51. Review of captives: Room B, Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II, panels B1817b, and B85b (E. A. Wallis Budge, *Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum: Reign of Ashurnasirpal: 885–860 BC* [London, 1914], pl. XX; Meuszyński [as in n. 4], pl. 2), palace gates, bands L1 (Richard Barnett, "More Balawat Gates: A Preliminary Report," in *Symbolae Biblicae et Mesopotamicae Francisco Mario Theodoro de Liagre Böhl Dedicatae*, ed. M. A. Beck et al. [Leiden: Brill, 1973], 19–22), R1 (King, pl. lxxviii), L4 (unpublished), and R4 (Cifarelli, fig. 39).

52. Judg. 16:1–22.

53. Ulla Jeyes, *Old Babylonian Extispicy Texts* (Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut de Istanbul, 1989), 16, 40.

54. For example, Middle Assyrian law stipulated that the hair and beard be cut from a man who could not prove an accusation of adultery against his wife. The verb for this punishment is *gadāmu*; see CAD, G, 8. Another verb, *gullubu*, has as its first meaning "to shave" all or part of the hair as a punishment or as a slave (CAD, G, s.v. *gullubu* (1), 129–30, and as its second meaning "to consecrate a priest by shaving" (CAD, G, s.v. *gullubu* (1), 130). See also CAD, Š, pt. 2, s.v. *šartu* (1), (2), (hair), 125–29.

55. See, for example, palace gate, band L1, Barnett (as in n. 51), unnumbered plate.

56. Zainab Bahrani, "Iconography of the Nude in Mesopotamia," *Source* 12, no. 2 (1993): 12–19.

57. James Pritchard, "The Epic of Gilgamesh," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), Tablet II, iii, lines 25–26.

58. For legal texts from the 2nd millennium, see Malul (as in n. 23), 122–38; and CAD, E, *erū* (1), "naked," 320.

59. Contra Bahrani (as in n. 56), who discusses the nude representations of temple personnel from the 3rd millennium B.C.E. in southern Mesopotamia.

60. Pritchard (as in n. 57), Tablet IX, ii, lines 23.

61. CAD, E, s.v. *erū* (1), "naked"; (2), "empty"; (3), "destitute," 320.

62. The reference to defeated non-Assyrians with yokes appears first in the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 B.C.E.), Grayson, 1991, A.O. 78.1, lines 4–5, *ni-ir be-lu-ti-ia [kabta?] UGU-šu-nu* u. Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 B.C.E.) also uses this construction frequently in his inscriptions.

63. I have addressed the various interpretive issues engendered by representations of women in a paper entitled "The Female Body in Assyrian Art: Gesture, Exposure, and Violation," delivered at the Annual Meetings of the Archaeological Institute of America in San Diego, December 1995. This material is currently being prepared for publication.

64. The best-known representation of an Assyrian woman is that of King Ashurbanipal's wife, Ashur-sharrat, in the "victory garden" relief from Room S of the North Palace at Nineveh, in Orthmann (as in n. 36), fig. 247.

65. For a discussion of the paucity of representations of women in the art of Mesopotamia, see, for example, Irene J. Winter, "Women in Public: The Disk of Enheduanna, the Beginning of the Office of the EN-priestess, and the

Weight of Visual Evidence," in *La femme dans le proche-orient antique*, ed. Jean-Marie Durand (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987).

66. It is not entirely clear whether she is intended to appear nude from the waist up or if the breast is simply being emphasized. Similarly, female prisoners on one of the bronze bands from the reign of Shalmaneser III (band XIII, in King, pl. LXXV) from the Syrian kingdom of Hamath appear to be bare-breasted and are making the same "hair-tearing" gesture. I discuss the significance of this feature in Cifarelli (as in n. 63).

67. 2 Sam. 13:19.

68. Richard Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 35, B8, figs. 1–3.

69. A short skirt that reveals the ankles and lower legs is only one element of the physical stereotype of the prostitute in Victorian England; see Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality* (New York: B. Blackwell, 1988), 176–95. For images of prostitutes with raised or shortened skirts in 19th-century London, see, for example, Nead, figs. 26, 30, 31, 40, 41, 42, 44; in French Impressionist art, see Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love, Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), figs. 55, 58, 63, 70, 92. The shortened skirt associated with urban prostitution appears to be related to the garments of working rural women, who were considered by the contemporary bourgeoisie to be paradoxically healthy, "natural," closer to the earth, morally degraded, and sexually suspect. See Nead, 31. This observation is limited to representations of women in contemporary "public" settings and excludes the genre of the nude.

70. See, for example, the women painted by George Elgar Hicks for his series *Woman's Mission*, in Nead (as in n. 69), pls. 1–3.

71. In a few cases, the breasts of captive women appear to be carefully rendered and emphasized, as in the woman at left in Fig. 18. This topic will be addressed in Cifarelli (as in n. 63).

72. Godfrey R. Driver and J. C. Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 126–34.

73. Foster (as in n. 27), 701, line 52. The precise reading of this phrase is open to question. Livingstone (as in n. 27), 46, translates it as "the women of his land I drove before my troops."

74. Malul (as in n. 23), 151, 184, 198–202. The divorce documents describing this symbolic act date to the Old Babylonian and Nuzi period.

75. *Ibid.*, 122–38. Again, the documents in question are from Nuzi and the kingdom of Ḫana.

76. Marcus (as in n. 8), 202, has suggested that Assyrian visual and verbal descriptions of territorial conquest are often cast in terms and metaphorical constructs that are sexually charged, which characterize Assyrian imperial activity as the masculine sexual conquest of feminized space: the rape of a foreign land, in effect. Within this eroticized discourse, these women revealing themselves are visual metaphors for the land that is to be "penetrated" and vanquished.

77. Liverani argues convincingly that the descriptions, in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, of intervention in neighboring lands are couched in terms connoting the transformation of chaos into order. The descriptions of non-Assyrian behavior in battle in the royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal range from cowardly flight and submission to rebellion. My examination of these texts has demonstrated that the narrative context surrounding such

descriptions, that is, the characterization of the level of brutality employed by the Assyrians against the enemy, indicates the ideological implications of the behavior. For example, submission is repaid with mercy (positive); flight with massacre (negative); and rebellion with defeat in battle and extramilitary atrocities (most negative). Simply engaging the Assyrian army in battle was considered an act of rebellion. See Cifarelli, 209–15.

78. This observation is plainly at variance with Henrietta Groenewegen-Frankfort's comment in *Arrest and Movement* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 172, that "the enemy never shows abject terror: the fight is fierce and virile . . . not a single battle scene contains a clue as to its outcome, the spectator is held in suspense. . . ." Her description overlooks the obvious implications of the appearance of many of these fleeing figures and of the piles of mutilated enemy corpses and severed enemy heads in the majority of these scenes.

79. *Iliad* 3.16–31.

80. This figure type appears in the Throne Room of the Northwest Palace in panels B11a and B8a, and with the lowered bow in B10a, B9a, and on the palace gates in bands L6, L7, R6, and R7.

81. Wolfram von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1965–81), 1424. This term appears in both the Neo-Assyrian and the Standard Babylonian dialects of Akkadian; in both prayers and the royal inscriptions of Ashurbanipal; Gruber, 50–58.

82. See, for example, palace bands L6 (Cifarelli, fig. 39), as well as R6, L7, and Mamu Temple gate band L6, all unpublished (for descriptions, see Cifarelli, app. A).

83. See Grayson, 1991, A.O. 101.1, i, lines 34.

84. For the equation of the bow with virility in western Semitic cultures, see Seth Parker, "Death and Devotion: The Composition and Theme of AQHT*," in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East, Essays in Honor of Marvin Pope*, ed. John H. Marks and Robert M. Good (Guildford, Conn.: Four Quarters, 1987), 71–83, esp. n. 47. In Egypt, this correlation is explicit, as the verb meaning "to shoot" is the same verb used to express "to ejaculate"; Richard Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 182. The evidence from Mesopotamia is more equivocal. The verbs commonly associated with archery range from the generic (see CAD, N, pt. 2, s.v. *naḏû*, which refers to emissions of all kinds, from throwing to spitting, 68; CAD, Š, pt. 1, s.v. *šalû* (1), "to spit," (2), "to shoot an arrow," 272–73) to the more specific (*našāku*, CAD, N, pt. 2, "to shoot an arrow," 15). According to Ann Guinan (personal communication), ejaculation, however, is expressed by *galātu* in Akkadian, a verb whose primary meaning is "to tremble."

85. For the reign of Shalmaneser, see esp. King, pl. xii. The Shalmaneser bands bear captions that identify the location of the action as the land of Urartu, a polity centered in the mountainous region northeast of Assyria. The Ashurnasirpal band bears a fragmentary caption that features an unidentified geographical term, "Mt. Urinu." Similarities in terrain and in headgear suggest that the figures on the Mamu Temple gate of Ashurnasirpal are Urartean as well. The Mamu Temple gates, in the collections of the Iraqi Antiquities Authority, will be published together with the palace gate bands in a volume forthcoming from the British Museum.

86. For the notion of the use of topographical elements as a means of creating a more accurate, verifiable representation, see, for example, Russell (as in n. 7); and Winter (as in n. 9).



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Mytho-Theology in Ancient Egypt

VINCENT ARIEH TOBIN

I.

An analysis of Egyptian religion is a matter which may be approached by one of two methods. The simpler of these methods is to view the religion of Egypt as a strictly polytheistic system, one which contained a number of different gods each of whom was responsible for a specific aspect of life and the world. Such an interpretation would, for example, state that Shu was the god of the air, Hathor the goddess of sexuality and love, Geb the god of the earth, and Nut the goddess of the sky. We could proceed further to divide the whole of human experience among the various other Egyptian deities, and thus produce a picture of an ordered divine pantheon whose function was the protection of all areas of man's existence. Such an interpretation would further imply that the Egyptians had evolved a highly fundamentalist approach to religion and had expressed no higher spiritual aspirations than the veneration of a set of totally anthropomorphic deities. The actual content of the religion, therefore, could be said to be the mythology through which the actions of these deities were expressed, there being no attempts at a more abstract and philosophical speculation.

Such an interpretation does contain a certain amount of truth. The ancient Egyptians were neither philosophically nor theologically minded, and hence spiritual and religious values required an expression which was concrete and anthropomorphic. Nor can there be any doubt that to many of the common people religion must have meant no more than a literal acceptance of the mythological gods. At the same time, however, there is another method of viewing the religion of ancient Egypt, one which is more legitimately in keeping with the mythic nature of that religion. This interpretation will view the

mythology of Egypt for what in effect mythology truly is: an attempt to give concrete expression to an abstract reality. Unlike the later Greek, the Egyptian had not yet developed the intellectual ability to think in abstract terms. As a result, there was developed, particularly through the agency of the priestly classes, a system wherein the gods, although expressed in anthropomorphic terms, functioned, nevertheless, more as mythic symbols than anthropomorphic deities. The gods of Egypt, therefore, even though they were worshipped and portrayed as individual personal deities, must be understood on a higher level as component parts in a wider mythic system of thought. Within the confines of the various individual cults, each god had a certain identity and character of his own; but within the context of the various corpora of Egyptian religious texts, it is possible and quite legitimate to see the individual gods as having a more important mythic and symbolic value and significance. We cannot, of course, properly claim that the Egyptians had developed a theological system, but we can quite correctly speak of an Egyptian mytho-theological system, one which expressed through the mythic symbols of its gods and its traditions the abstract concepts which later civilizations would express through an abstract philosophy or theology. The hallmark of the Egyptian system of thought was the fact that its expression of such abstractions was forced to retain a concrete manner of articulation.

In its structure and make-up Egyptian religion was totally unlike the forms of religion known in the modern western world. It contained no doctrine or dogma; it had no set and required beliefs; there was no standard of orthodoxy which its adherents were expected to accept. In fact, the very contrary appears to have been the case, for Egyptian religion has been described as

consisting of a "confused mass of material"¹ and as being made up of a number of "unrelated local cults."² It contained what Henri Frankfort has called a "multiplicity of approaches" as well as a "multiplicity of answers." Egyptian religion was, therefore, marked by an exceedingly high degree of freedom of belief, and, except for the short-lived Amarna period under the heretic pharaoh Akhenaten, the concept of religious heterodoxy was totally unknown to the Egyptians. All of the symbols and expressions of the various local cults and traditions were regarded as valid and correct expressions of religious faith, and internal contradictions in articulation were seen as both acceptable and natural. Egypt's complex mythological system has been aptly described as being "completely free of those logics which eliminate one of two contradictory concepts and press religious ideas into a system of dogmas."³ Such an approach to the content of a religion can only be possible when it is quite obvious that the concrete expressions of that religion are indeed mythic and symbolic in nature and are not intended to be taken as factual dogmatic statements of a literal "truth." Such a flexible approach to the realm of the spiritual appears to be the most positive feature of the religion of ancient Egypt, for this approach enabled it to encompass virtually any religious symbol as a valid expression of abstract reality.

This freedom of Egyptian religion from doctrine and dogma has led some interpreters to suggest that even mythology played a role of relatively small importance,⁴ and that the main emphasis of Egyptian religion was the performance of the cultic rituals. Such an interpretation would naturally imply that any stress on the mythological content of Egyptian religion would strongly distort the true nature of that religion, such a distortion being even greater if we were to attempt to stress doctrine or dogma. Such an assertion, however, must be tempered by a

realization of the nature of the cultic ritual in ancient Egypt. Cult, not only in Egypt but in any religious system, is an expression of myth and not simply a performance of empty and meaningless rituals. In Egypt the cultic ritual was the visible and dramatized expression of the mythological content of religion. If, therefore, we interpret Egyptian religion as having its main basis in the cult, we must, nevertheless, consider also the mythic symbols of which that cult is the expression, for it is in these mythic symbols that the basic spiritual and theological values of Egyptian religion are to be found.

In considering Egyptian mythology, however, we must be careful not to be misled by any comparison of it with the mythology of ancient Greece. In contrast to Greek mythology, the myths of Egypt do not present us with highly developed and intricate narrative patterns. There are, in other words, very few stories and traditions about the Egyptian gods; there are very few actions and deeds of the gods preserved in any narrative compositions. This, however, does not prevent the Egyptian gods from being the mythic symbols which the cultic rituals expressed, mythic symbols which themselves gave expression to an abstract reality. In actual fact it may indeed be this very poverty of mythological material which enabled the Egyptian gods to be what in effect they were, "an enunciation of a reality and not an explanation of this reality."⁵ The lack of mythological detail prevented the Egyptian myths from becoming dogmatic and doctrinal statements. Hence the gods of Egypt were able to function as symbols which articulated the assurance that behind the visible world there lay a realm which could not be comprehended by the intellect but which could be apprehended by mythic and cultic experience.

Despite the non-dogmatic and non-doctrinal nature of the religion of Egypt, there was, nevertheless, one fundamental idea which may be seen as the basic doctrinal content of that religion. This was the idea that the world and the universe were parts of a strict and unchanging order of stability. This order was an expression of

¹ H. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (New York, 1948) vi.

² *Loc. cit.*

³ R. Anthes, "Egyptian Theology in the Third Millennium B.C.," *JNES* XVIII (1959) 170.

⁴ See, for example, C. J. Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals* (Leiden, 1967) 1-4; and Drioton & Vandier, *L'Égypte*, 6th ed. (Paris, 1984) 61.

⁵ R. G. Bonnet and V. A. Tobin, "Christ and Osiris," *Pharaonic Egypt, the Bible and Christianity*, ed. S. I. Groll (Jerusalem, 1985) 3.

the peculiar Egyptian conception of Ma^cat. To the Egyptian mind Ma^cat was both an abstract idea and concept of universal stability as well as the personalized goddess who represented and upheld that order. According to the Egyptian mythical expressions, Ma^cat had come into existence at the time of the creation and continued to be the principle which guaranteed and assured the on-going stability of that creation. Within this order of Ma^cat, the universe, the world, and the political state all had their appointed place; and it was within this same order that each individual also was able to find meaning and significance for his own existence. In effect Ma^cat governed every aspect of human, political, and natural life. Even matters as relatively minute as individual personal etiquette could be said to be encompassed by Ma^cat. Every human action was evaluated not by a prescribed system of laws and rules, but by how far it conformed to the general principle of right and order which was expressed by Ma^cat. It was the assurance of the stability of Ma^cat which gave the Egyptian his confidence that the world in which he lived was stable and unchanging; it was Ma^cat which prevented the world and the universe from dissolving into chaos and disorder. Ma^cat, in short, could well be seen as the Egyptian consciousness of the existence of a transcendent divine power which was the basis and ground for all being and existence. If the religion of Egypt and the cult through which that religion was expressed could be said to have any one fundamental doctrine and purpose, it was to uphold and renew the order of Ma^cat. The cultic ritual was performed on its daily basis as well as at the great festivals for the one main purpose of affirming the existence of Ma^cat and of bringing into actual reality the order and stability symbolized by that figure. In view of such a purpose, we may well state that Egypt's religious cultic practices were practical and pragmatic to the highest degree, for they were designed to strengthen and ensure the cosmic order by the dramatic performance of the mythical concepts on which they were based. In brief, Egyptian religion meant no less than the recognition of universal stability, and to be religious would have implied the conscious attempt to remain within the bounds and requirements of that same stability.

The sense of order and stability which was characteristic of Egyptian religion may be seen as natural when one considers the two chief sources of Egyptian religious consciousness. One of these sources, and probably the main one, was the order and stability so evident in the natural world. The regular rising and falling of the Nile, the daily return of the sun, and the constant recurrence of the seasons all pointed to the unfailing assurance that the positive powers of life and light would always overcome the negative forces of darkness and death. Unlike the area of Mesopotamia, Egypt was not forced to live in fear of the unpredictable, and often destructive, power of nature. In the natural phenomena the Egyptians saw no evidence of threats of disaster, but rather the guarantee that the forces of nature were positive and productive of life. Nature and the universe were in their very essence good to mankind; therefore the gods in which the Egyptian personified the natural forces were also good. It was obvious to them that death with its destructive effects was not the ultimate force in the universe. That ultimate force was rather to be seen in the power of the life which was so evident in the natural world. Hence, the Egyptian knew, by a kind of natural revelation, that life would constantly overcome death and that order would overcome disorder.

A similar assurance was given to the Egyptians in the stability of the political order which had been established at the time of the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt at the start of the dynastic period. With the land united under a stable monarchy, and with the institution of the kingship deified by its association with the figures of Horus and Osiris, the former of these deities being actually incarnate in the ruling monarch, there was need of no other signs or symbols of both natural and political stability. The very person of the monarch served as a guarantee that the reality of Ma^cat could not be permanently threatened in the political and social order; the ruler himself was expected to function as the effective agent of maintaining Ma^cat and restoring it whenever it might be thrown out of balance through some accident or mistake in human action. As a result, the Old Kingdom of Egypt was able to develop an extremely high degree of optimism about life and

the world, and this optimism in turn was reflected in the positive mythic symbols of the religion and in the cult which both affirmed and effected the reality of Ma^cat in the universe and in human affairs. If we were, therefore, to attempt to point to one characteristic Egyptian religious emotion, we would have to state that that emotion was one of a joyful celebration of the stable and unchanging nature of the universe in which man lived. That this universe should be stable and unchanging was the primary goal and purpose of the power of Ma^cat.

Due to the abstract nature of this concept of order, its expression had to be articulated by means of a pattern of concrete mythic symbols. Thus the mythology of Egypt was not just a collection of fantastic legends of the gods, nor was it a simplistic way of explaining the existence and working of the universe. The myths of the gods were not intended to be accepted as literal beliefs. The myth was rather a symbol which had been evolved to express "the infinite complexity of divine power".⁶ The myth-makers of Egypt appear to have recognized the fact that the dichotomy between the world of human experience and the world of the divine was so great that the latter could be represented only through the means of myth and symbol, no literal description being possible. The various mythic symbols and narratives were in no way intended to define the world of the divine, but rather to give expression to the concept that the creation and the universe do have a real significance and meaning.⁷ The myths could not, of course, provide in any allegorical fashion a precise definition of this meaning, but they could point to its existence and provide at least an experiential apprehension of it. Unlike the "myths" of the epic poetry of Homer, the Egyptian myths were designed not merely to entertain but to edify, and beyond edification, actually to effect the reality which they symbolized.

For the Egyptian mind, the divine world, and to a certain extent even the visible world, was something which was mysterious and totally other than the world of normal human comprehension. Human intellectual abilities were, there-

fore, not capable of grasping or articulating its nature and structure. As a result the Egyptian mentality used the one means which was comprehensible for such articulation, and hence to speak of the mythic tradition of ancient Egypt as "mythological rubbish"⁸ is to misunderstand totally the function of true myth. Far from being "rubbish," Egyptian mythology served as the one viable means of expressing the wholly other world and realm of the divine.

The actual time of the mythological traditions, the period at which they were said to have taken place, was usually the far distant past, a period beyond the normal experience of man. At the same time, however, the myths of Egypt were also applicable to the contemporary world in which they were articulated and dramatized. The true realm of Egyptian mythology was the realm of eternity; the myths were in effect timeless, designed to bring about in the present an "actualization of the mythic pantheon."⁹ Such an actualization was the primary purpose of the cultic dramatization of the myth. In the cultic ritual the dramatization of the myth functioned as a type of revelation of the divine world; but due to the fact that such a revelation remained in symbolic terms, the aspect of the secret and mysterious nature of the divine world was not violated. In such a manner the Egyptians were able to experience the world of the divine in a sacramental manner without running the risk of committing the blasphemy of claiming an actual intellectual comprehension of that world.

It is important to note here that the cultic performance of a myth was not a mere commemoration of an event which had taken place in the distant past. It was in effect an attempt to make real in the present moment that same mythic action and to actualize its significance in the present moment. In such a manner, for example, the priesthood of Heliopolis would have given cultic actualization to the creation myth of Atum-Re, and would have thus re-created in the present moment the original action of the establishment of the world. The pragmatic pur-

⁶ H. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 19.

⁷ C. J. Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals*, 11.

⁸ A. H. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford, 1961) 227.

⁹ S. Morenz, *La religion égyptienne* (Paris, 1977) 119 (translated from the original German).

pose of the cult and its myth was thus realized in the actual re-establishment of the universe and its order of Ma^cat. The detailed content of the myth was of little actual importance. What was important was the fact of expressing in symbolic terms the basic concept which the mythic symbol embodied. The articulation within the cultic ritual of the concept of order and stability in creation brought about the actualization of Ma^cat within the world of human experience, thus allowing the cult to function as a sacrament of the divine stability of the universe and of the world in which man lived.

II.

The gods of the Egyptians, although always portrayed in anthropomorphic and theriomorphic forms, were not such simplistic beings as their iconography might suggest. Again one must remember that, like the symbols of the mythic tradition, the portraits of the gods should also be taken in a symbolic manner. Such a symbolic portrayal of the gods was a necessity because, like every other aspect of the divine world, the gods were mysterious and indefinable, their true essence being unknown to mortal man who could hope to know them only after death when he would be capable of perceiving the true forms of the gods.¹⁰ The fact that the gods were unknowable to man arose from the fact that they were holy (*d̥sr*), which implies that they were different than and separate from¹¹ man; they were secret,¹² and hence their essence and true being could be neither described nor portrayed. However, even though the gods were unknowable, man could nevertheless experience them; and he experienced them as being beneficial and good (*nfr*) to man and the world in keeping with the positive and optimistic nature of the outlook engendered by the realization of Ma^cat. Indeed it was the main function of the gods to see to it that this same order of Ma^cat was supported and upheld.

The gods of Egypt, at least in their mythic representations, were seen as personal deities; if

they had not been so, they could have made no appeal to the non-abstract Egyptian mentality. Their true value, however, went far beyond their personal nature. Most importantly, the gods of Egypt must be seen as mythic personifications of the various aspects and powers of the world. The very name of Amun, for example, meant "he who is hidden," the secret and unknown force which upholds the universe. Nun was the primaeval water, Kuk the darkness, and Huh infinity. Geb was the earth with its procreative power in Osiris, while Nut was the goddess who personified the sky. This deification of the natural phenomena and the natural forces constituted a recognition by the ancient Egyptian of the essentially mystical nature of his environment. Hence, he was able to apprehend and experience the rational and ordered nature of the universe, even though he could not give rational articulation to it.

The mythical aspect of the gods lay in the fact that they were symbolic of deeper forces and powers than man could comprehend. The gods of Egypt, however, were not mythical in the same sense that the Homeric gods were mythical, for the Egyptian gods appear to have had no extended mythological narratives associated with them. Nevertheless, this latter fact does not decrease the mythic value of the Egyptian gods; if anything, it enhances such value, for it prevented the gods from becoming the subjects of mere narrative legends and fables. By their refusal to develop a complex system of legends and sagas, the Egyptian gods were able to retain their value as full mythic figures right up until the end of their history as a viable religious concept.

The mythic value of the gods lay in the fact that when taken as a whole they could function as symbols of the totality and completeness of all things. The very name of the creator god Atum signifies something like "he who is complete",¹³ that is, the one who contains within himself the fullness of all things. The sacredness of the life-giving creative force was symbolized in the figures of Min of Coptos and Ptah of Memphis. In Osiris there was deified the natural life-force of the earth and the resulting rebirth of the dead

¹⁰ CT VI, 69c, 72d.

¹¹ PT 1778b.

¹² Wb V, 610.

¹³ See R. Anthes *JNES* XVIII (1959) 177.

in the next world. The sun god Re of Heliopolis provided a deification of the creative power of the sun, as did the later figure of the Aten in Akhenaten's system during the Amarna period. Even the deity Sokar, a god of the dead somewhat related to Osiris, appears to signify the potentiality of death to reproduce life, and the main purpose of his festival seems to have been to ensure the constant generation of life.¹⁴ The mythic symbolism of the sun god Re and his daily journey in the sunboat served for the Egyptian as an assurance of the daily rebirth of the sun and the return of the natural life and activity of the world, the latter idea also being very strongly emphasized in the figure of the Aten during the Amarna period.

It is significant to note that most of the Egyptian male deities have associated with them a female counterpart. We may note, for example, Osiris and Isis, Amun and Mut, Ptah and Sekhmet, Horus and Hathor, Geb and Nut, Shu and Tefnut. Such a pairing of the masculine and feminine appears to be more than just a sense of balance, as has been suggested.¹⁵ Rather it appears as a recognition of the necessary complementary aspects of the male and female as concerns regeneration and procreation. This is particularly evident in the fact that from such divine pairs there frequently comes an offspring indicative of the results of the procreative power. The offspring of such divine couples are then associated with their parents to form a number of divine triads which function as symbols of the continuity of life. In such a manner the mythic systems of Egypt deified the principle of procreation and regeneration, this principle becoming an integral part of the cosmic order of the universe.

To summarize the gods of Egypt, we may state that in their deepest essence they were mythic symbols of the active power of creation, life, and regeneration. They were symbolic too of order and stability in the universe, especially the figure of Ma'at, and through them such order and stability were maintained and assured. Because the gods were different from man, they were

beyond his comprehension. They were not, however, beyond his apprehension, for they could be experienced in the universe and in life itself. The gods were of necessity many, for the complexity of the divine world could not be comprehended in any one single symbol. The one attempt to do so, that of Akhenaten, failed because it was so totally foreign to the Egyptian religious experience. However, beyond the polytheistic symbolism of Egyptian religion one can comprehend that the Egyptian intellect was able to sense some unarticulated unity in the divine force which upheld the universe. This was the primary meaning of the Egyptian gods: they were the very force and essence of the cosmic life which expressed itself in the totality of all things.

III.

The symbolic nature of Egyptian religion is perhaps best illustrated in the creation mythology. Such creation myths were not intended as historical and factual accounts of the manner and method by which the universe emerged, although they did provide a type of articulation of the way by which things had come into existence. They did not, however, give a precise answer to the question of how the world had come into being, at least not in terms of the actual mechanics of creation. The Egyptians were quite likely aware of the fact that such myths were of a non-historical nature, intended only to express symbolically the make-up of the universe.¹⁶ Hence, we may not maintain that the Egyptians had several doctrines or dogmas of creation. They had rather several myths of creation, several sets of symbols which were used to articulate the same reality. As a result, they were able to attribute the creation of the universe to such different deities as Atum, Ptah, or Amun without seeing any inherent contradiction. We may, therefore, speak of a single Egyptian concept of creation, but not of a single expression of that creation. Nor was the creator deity required to be one and the same in every creation myth, with the exception of the Amarna period when creative powers were attributed to the Aten alone.

¹⁴ C. J. Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals*, 86.

¹⁵ J. Wilson in *Before Philosophy*, ed. H. Frankfort (Penguin Books, 1949) 50.

¹⁶ R. T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1959) 226.

At Heliopolis and Hermopolis it was the sun god who was seen as the creator. At Memphis Ptah was said to have created the world, particularly through the agency of the spoken word as seen in the document known as the Memphite Theology. At Elephantine it was the potter god, Khnum, who was the agent of creation. All of these creator deities were for the Egyptian not actual anthropomorphic gods who had acted in a specific manner to bring the universe into being; they were rather symbols of the mysterious and undefinable force of life and generation which was naturally inherent within the divine.

Creation itself, however, was not a symbol. In Egyptian thought, the universe had come into being at a specific time in the past, and, according to the Pyramid Texts, there had been a time when nothing had existed,¹⁷ at least nothing specific and tangible. This does not, however, mean that the Egyptians had evolved a doctrine of creation out of nothing, for in the period before creation there had existed the primaeval waters of Nun, symbolic of chaos and disorder, the unbounded, and the negative infinite. At the same time, this Nun contained within itself the full creative potential, embodying both the masculine and feminine principles necessary for procreation and generation. This primaeval water appears to have been the foundation of all Egyptian creation mythology, being a common symbol in all the mythic systems.¹⁸ Within the primaeval waters were begotten the Heh gods, all symbolic of chaos, infinity, and shapelessness, each of the masculine Heh gods being balanced by a female counterpart, a recognition of the positive creative power naturally inherent within the chaos. Out of the primaeval water there emerged the sun god, the creator Atum-Re, whose very name, Atum, symbolizes fullness or completion, the total potentiality for all created

being. Atum-Re, seated upon the primaeval mound which had also arisen out of Nun, then produces by himself (either by spitting or by masturbation) Shu and Tefnut (the latter being also identified with Ma'at) both of whom are symbolic of breath and order. Shu and Tefnut, respectively male and female, may now be seen as symbols of the actualization of regenerative power, the power which in both its masculine and feminine principles had already been inherent within Atum-Re who is called the "he/she".¹⁹ By the division of the creative principle into two distinct male and female hypostases, the Egyptian myth-makers had created in Shu and Tefnut individual deities who could symbolize the actuality of the creative force. As a natural consequence, Shu and Tefnut then beget Geb and Nut, respectively the earth and sky, respectively male and female, thus giving a concrete expression to the created order by the emergence of the actual physical structure of the universe. The figures which emerge in the next step of this mythic system (which is basically the system of Heliopolis) are Osiris and Isis, Seth and Nephthys, in both of which pairs the masculine and feminine are also balanced. Of these latter deities, it is Osiris and Isis who bear the strongest mythic importance, Osiris being the personification of ordered political stability in the fact that he inherits the kingship from Atum through Geb, and Isis being in effect the personification of the royal throne and its ruling power. The full mythic impact of the Heliopolitan tradition was thus extended as far as the political organization which governed Egypt, such a political structure being, therefore, an integral part of the divinely created universal order.²⁰

We may note here in passing the strong element of sexual symbolism in the Egyptian creation mythology, a symbolism which was expressed in the male/female pairing of the deities within the Heliopolitan system. We must not, however, place an overly heavy stress on this sexual imagery, for the intention of the

¹⁷ PT 1466: *n ḥprt pt n ḥprt t3*
n ḥprt rmt m mst ntrw
n ḥprt mt

The sky had not yet come into being,
The earth had not yet come into being,
Mankind had not yet come into being,
The gods had not yet been born,
Death had not yet come into being.

¹⁸ Clark, *Myth and Symbol*, 35.

¹⁹ CT II, 161a.

²⁰ An extended treatment of the Osiris tradition with its political overtones may be found in R. Bonnet and V. Tobin, "Christ and Osiris" in *Pharaonic Egypt, the Bible and Christianity*, ed. S. I. Groll (Jerusalem, 1985) 1-29.

Egyptian myth-makers was not to evolve a doctrine of the creation based on sexuality, but rather one which was based on the procreative and regenerative powers symbolized by the sexual division of the divine power. This sexual symbolism even found an expression in the relatively myth-free system of Akhenaten during the Amarna movement, where the deity of that movement, the Aten, is addressed: "You are the mother and father of everyone whom you create."²¹ The point which we must stress in considering such imagery is that for the Egyptian the creation of the universe was symbolically expressed through the usage of the imagery of birth, and as a result the universe was seen as a vital and living organism. Such was totally in agreement with the Egyptian affirmation of the reality and sanctity of the life force as opposed to the destructive forces of death and disorder so evident in the figure of the god Seth. In Egyptian thought, the mythic symbolism of the creation was an affirmation and celebration of the reality and indestructable force and power of life.

The ultimate result of the Egyptian mythic accounts of the creation was the conception of Ma^cat. Ma^cat may be variously described as a symbol or abstract idea of order and right, as the force of universal and unchanging stability, or as a personal goddess who embodies and enforces the latter. To see Ma^cat as only a personal goddess would be to underestimate its nature. It is true that Ma^cat was personified and that she was the object of cultic worship, but this was no more than a way of giving expression to the existential reality of such a concept. Ma^cat represented, perhaps even more than the idea of a creator god, the real foundation stone of the spirituality of Egypt. Ma^cat was seen as the force which ensured the order and stability of all creation, of the state and of life itself. Ma^cat was something which could not cease to exist, something which could not change or evolve, something which was perfect and complete from the very beginning. Without Ma^cat neither the created universe nor the gods would be able to exist. Ma^cat has been aptly described as "the cosmic force of harmony, order, stability and security,

... the organizing quality of created phenomena ... the just and proper relationship of cosmic phenomena".²²

As a result of this concept of the eternally stable and unchanging nature of Ma^cat, the Egyptians evolved a highly optimistic outlook on the world, or perhaps one might say that the development of Ma^cat was a consequence of the optimism which already existed in Egyptian society, optimism justified because of the regularity of the Egyptian world. The pleas of the Eloquent Peasant, so well known from the text which bears the same title, are all based on the assurance that Ma^cat is "mighty, great, and enduring".²³ As a powerful force for justice and the maintenance of moral right, Ma^cat provided both the justification of moral action and the ability to perform such action. A world wherein Ma^cat did not exist or was at least disregarded would have been for the Egyptian totally unacceptable. Such a situation is graphically described in the text known as the "Dispute of a Man with his Ba," wherein there is portrayed an individual who actually contemplates suicide because of the breakdown of order and morality within the land. Under normal circumstances, however, Ma^cat, the very principle of creation, was ordered, regular, and benevolent, an assurance that the universe was essentially good and righteous. Ma^cat bound all things together in an indestructable unity: the universe, the natural order, the state, and the individual were all component parts of the order of Ma^cat. The result was the conception of a perfect universe which could never be totally destroyed. Although from time to time this order might be disrupted and thrown out of balance through human error or folly, Ma^cat provided the assurance that in the final outcome order would again be restored and life be enabled to continue on its normally positive course.

Within the order of creation and Ma^cat, the Egyptian king, the pharaoh, played a role of central importance. Although the theological formulations concerning this individual were highly complex and elaborate, let it suffice for the

²¹ M. Sandman, *Texts from the Time of Akhenaten* (Bruxelles, 1938) 12.10.

²² J. Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt* (University of Chicago Press, 1951) 48.

²³ *The Eloquent Peasant* B1, 320-21.

present purpose to say that he was the earthly embodiment of the power of Ma^cat and the effective agent through which the latter was realized within the political and social spheres of Egypt. As the incarnation of Horus, specifically Horus as he was portrayed in the mythic tradition of the conflict with Seth, the pharaoh was the direct heir of Osiris, and through him the direct heir of the divine kingship which had originally been established at the time of the creation of the universe. As such he had both the ability and the duty to be the upholder of Ma^cat within the earthly sphere, and his very words and pronouncements were regarded as embodiments of the eternal principles for which Ma^cat stood. The pharaoh has been well described as "a token of the efficacious power of the creator god in the world,"²⁴ and, being such, it was his function to see to it that the order of Ma^cat, established at the time of creation, was upheld and realized within Egyptian politics and society. Because of such a role on the part of the pharaoh, it was only at a very late date that official law codes came into existence in Egypt. Throughout the great periods of the history of Egypt, such law codes were totally unnecessary. It could perhaps even have been regarded as a blasphemy to think of substituting a dead law code for the living word of the pharaoh in whom the principles of Ma^cat were actually alive and vital. He was an integral element in the divinely created order, an integral element in the practical functioning of the power of Ma^cat. In a word, the pharaoh represented the embodiment of all power and authority, and this power and authority was the very power of the divine realm. In short, the person of the pharaoh was the guarantee of the divine presence of the gods on earth. The Egyptian mythic system could have developed no stronger symbol of the reality of the divine power than this. Furthermore, through his priestly power the pharaoh also functioned as an assurance of the mediation of the natural blessings of the gods to the land of Egypt.

The place of the pharaoh within the Egyptian mytho-theological system can be briefly summed

up. The pharaoh was the one means whereby Ma^cat was maintained on earth. When he ascended the throne as ruler, Ma^cat was again re-established and revealed as it has been originally at the time of the creation. Throughout the duration of his life he was the living and ever-present symbol of the continuation of Ma^cat. When the obvious order of Ma^cat was threatened or disturbed, it was the pharaoh who was expected to take positive action to restore that order to its proper place. In this one individual there was summed up the true basis for the security of the Egyptian state and of the universe itself. Each individual was, therefore, assured of his own stability and the stability of his future within the cosmic order. Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Egyptian mytho-theological synthesis was this unity and purpose which it was able to give to the whole of the universe and to the whole of human experience.

IV.

The unity of existence was further expressed in Egyptian mythic symbolism through the figure of Osiris. In many ways Osiris could even be said to be the most central of the gods of Egypt, for he was connected with the kingship as the deified figure of the dead pharaoh, and also with the life of nature, and also, eventually, with the eternal life of each individual. No one origin can strictly be assigned to the figure of Osiris, and we are probably correct in assuming that he was a deity who had evolved from a number of different sources as an answer to several distinct aspirations. What concerns us, however, is the final picture of Osiris which emerged over a number of centuries. Nor should we be overly dogmatic in trying to reconstruct the details of the Osiris myth. That Osiris had a number of mythical activities and roles connected with him there can obviously be no doubt. More questionable, however, is the total myth of Osiris, a myth which appears to be of almost epic proportions. It is only through the writings of Plutarch that we possess any full extended account of the Osiris myth, and here we must seriously question whether Plutarch had simply reported the myth of Osiris as he had learned it from authentic Egyptian sources, or whether he had constructed

²⁴ E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many* (London, 1983) 142 (translated by J. Baines from the original German *Der Eine und die Vielen*).

a narrative myth in the Greek style out of the original Egyptian elements. The latter appears somewhat more likely to have been the case, insofar as the Egyptian sources give no full and complete narration of any one accepted Osirian mythical tradition. Any attempt to reconstruct such a fully developed mythical tradition with regard to Osiris could well lead us to a misunderstanding of the true nature of the deity. One must, rather, see the figure of Osiris as he was represented in the various symbols connected with him. Above all else (and perhaps this will in fact fully define the nature of the deity), Osiris may be seen as the principle of natural life and its continuity. He was the actual power and force of fertility,²⁵ being immanent and inherent within nature. As a deity of the life of nature, it was a logical step for Osiris to become eventually the god of individual immortality, man's life also being seen as part of the wider manifestation of the power of universal life. Although originally, at least in certain mythic traditions, a demon,²⁶ Osiris was, even during the Old Kingdom, accepted into the ranks of Egypt's official gods and made into a positive force of eternal life.

The most obvious manifestations of Osiris were to be seen in the phenomena of nature. He was present in the growing grain and the vegetation of the land; he was seen also in the waters of the Nile, often called the "great efflux of Osiris," for it was these waters which gave the land its fertility and allowed it to produce. It would be a mistake, however, simply to make the identification between Osiris and the earth or the waters. Osiris was more than this; he was the abstract source of fertility and life which was contained within the water.²⁷ From his observation of the unfailing return of the life of nature, the Egyptian must have very easily become aware that Osiris would also bring about the resurrection of each individual after death. Hence, Osiris finally reached his full potential as the god who could afford immortality to every man, the latter function being by far his most important aspect

even though it was but an extension of his true nature.

Osiris, however, in virtue of his place within the Heliopolitan Ennead and mythic system, was also a god of order, and as such he may be further seen as a revelation of the Egyptian concept of Ma'at. As the ruler who had inherited the kingship from his father Geb, and hence from Atum-Re, Osiris was also the symbol of the ideal terrestrial kingship; but because the created universe was to the Egyptian consciousness an actual living organism, Osiris' identification with natural life was also a logical one. The political world and the world of nature were for the Egyptian one and the same order, and the unity of that order was aptly represented in the figure of the god Osiris. However, unlike the more abstract symbol of life which one sees in Atum-Re, Osiris appears as more concrete, more immanent, more closely connected with the life and experience of each individual. It was perhaps for this reason that his popularity grew to the bounds which it eventually attained. The perfect order which was so evident in the world which revealed Osiris had also, in the thought of the Egyptian, to be able to overcome the negative aspect of death and destruction both as regards the wider order and as regards the individual. The optimism engendered by the concept of Ma'at could not be complete unless man was no longer threatened by eternal annihilation. It was, therefore, a natural process that the Egyptian should have arrived at a belief in the rebirth and immortality of the individual, and no more suitable god than Osiris could be found with whom to connect this hope which became one of the distinguishing characteristics of the religion of Egypt. The promise of personal immortality thus became one of the most positive and beneficial aspirations which the Egyptian religion gave to the world. The concept of the dying and rising god was one which appears to have exerted a tremendous influence on later religious development, not the least of its effects being quite evident within the mythology of the Christian tradition.

The most evident sphere of the interest and activity of Osiris was within the realm of individual immortality. The concept that eternal life could be attained by all men was a belief

²⁵ Clark, *Myth and Symbol*, 97.

²⁶ See, for example, *PT* 145b-c, 146a-b, 1267a-b; *CT* III, 295h-296a, 304f-g, VI, 79-81, 82-85; *BD* XVII, 30.

²⁷ J. H. Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (New York, 1959) 20 (reprint of the 1912 ed.).

which arose as a result of the confusion and chaos of the First Intermediate Period. Undoubtedly such a belief would have arisen naturally even without this latter impetus, for it is quite obviously a natural extension of the concept of the wider order of the life of the universe and nature. It is important to note, however, that the belief in the afterlife was a secondary development in Egyptian thought, and was based on the mythic system which had already evolved. The mythic system had been designed for the wider purpose of expressing the reality of universal order, not simply for satisfying the hopes and aspirations of individuals.

Egyptian mytho-theology had relatively little to say about the nature of man. He had been brought into being by the creator god, but more by accident than as a purposeful creation as in Hebrew thinking. Nor did the mythic system say a great deal about the final end of man, at least in the early period, except for the king whose eventual purpose was to be deified and to join the gods, an end which was later extended to all men. One aspect of man, however, was quite clear to the Egyptian consciousness: man was mortal; death was a reality, something to be feared and dreaded. Let us not think that the Egyptians were unaware of that grim fact.²⁸ The Egyptian fear of death is quite evident in the vast body of mortuary literature—Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, The Book of the Dead—which had been produced as an aid to overcoming the power of ultimate death. The affirmation afforded by such texts that death was not the final end must have done much to mitigate the natural fear of human mortality. The mortuary texts themselves often even deny the reality of death, the dead being spoken of as “the living ones” (*ḥw*). The Coffin Texts frequently show formulae which emphasize the fact that the deceased has not died, but that he lives.²⁹ The reality of human mortality was strongly affirmed in the figure of the god Sokar; but the further reality of life after death was even more strongly stressed in the figure of Osiris.

²⁸ On death as an object of fear for the Egyptians, see J. Zandee, *Death as an Enemy According to Ancient Egyptian Conceptions* (Leiden, 1960).

²⁹ See, for example, CT I, 187e: “Rise up to life, for you have not died.” CT II, li: “You have departed living; you have not departed dead.”

The place of the afterlife was no simple doctrine in the Egyptian system. The dead are said to live in the underworld, in the Western Land with Osiris, in the Hotep Fields, in the sky with the sun god Re, or even in the tomb itself. In brief, there was no one place which could be said to be the abode of the dead. The actual fact was that the next world was portrayed by a variety of symbols which were frequently contradictory and often out of keeping with one another. This, however, is entirely consistent with the methodology of Egyptian symbolism which in every aspect of religion allowed for totally different expressions. What is important about the Egyptian symbolism of the afterlife is the fact that it expressed the reality of that afterlife without tying itself to any one specific concept. The journey which the soul had to take to reach the next world is also described in very complex symbolism, and the dangers and difficulties of the route are far from minimal, especially in the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead. Here again one must ask how far such texts should be taken as literal descriptions and how far they should be seen as symbolic. My own inclination is to say that it is probably the aspect of symbolism which one should rather see in these texts, such symbolism being designed for the purpose of expressing the enormity and the importance of the transition from this world to the next. The transition from death to life was seen as the critical event in the existence of any individual, and hence the symbolism surrounding such an event had to be of a suitably complex nature, designed to express the solemnity of the event.

The most common deity with whom the resurrection of the individual was associated was of course Osiris, and many of the Egyptian funeral rituals appear to have centered around dramatizations and re-enactments of the elements of the Osiris myth, designed by their performance to identify the deceased with Osiris and thereby assure his or her immortality. The dead individual is, for that matter, frequently spoken of as being an Osiris, fully and completely identified with that deity. In effect, the process which the deceased must undergo appears to have been a full repetition of the process followed by Osiris himself. To put it another way, we may say that

the myth of the death and revitalization of Osiris was in fact a mythologization of the death and revitalization of each mortal individual. The patterns of mythic symbolism in such a case are given a purpose which is totally practical and pragmatic; they ensure and guarantee the continued life of every mortal.

It was not, however, only Osiris with whom the dead could be identified. The deceased might be called Horus, Shu, Seth, Thoth, Atum, Re, Isis, Anubis, Sobek or virtually any of the gods. The deceased could moreover, be transformed into the grain or the Nile, into the shape of various living entities within nature such as the crocodile, the lotus, or various birds. In brief, the deceased appears to have been able to assume any form he wished, the end title of Spell 301 of the Coffin Texts being "Taking shape as any god a man wishes."³⁰ This rich and varied symbolism expressing the transformed and spiritualized nature of the deceased appears in virtue of its very variety to point to the fact that such expressions must indeed be taken as only symbolic expressions. The Egyptians did not in such expressions claim that they would literally become the deity or the entity involved in the specific formula. What they were in fact affirming was that the soul of the deceased would after bodily death be transformed and revitalized into a spiritual entity which would share the eternal and on-going life of nature and the divine world. The specific image used to express such a transformation had relatively little importance, for it was not designed to give any concrete description of the type or manner of life to be followed in the next world. What mattered for the Egyptian mentality was that man would continue to survive as a personal individual and as part of the wider life cycle of the universe. The specific nature of that survival was such that it could not be graphically described in concrete terms and had, therefore, to be expressed in the type of symbols which could appeal to the normal experience of the human intellect. Nevertheless, survival after death was for the Egyptian such a reality that he had to speak of it even in terms of the physical body, for only in such a manner could he comprehend that the afterlife was indeed a reality. The actual nature and details of life beyond death may have

been for the Egyptian an unknown mystery, one which could not be given any accurate and certain description. It was, nevertheless, a reality, and that reality was affirmed and expressed in the mythic symbols which allowed man to experience what he could not comprehend by the powers of his intellect.

We must not think, however, that for the Egyptian the afterlife was an automatic occurrence, dependent only upon the correct performance of the funeral rituals. An important prerequisite for continued survival after death lay in the fact that man must have lived an upright and righteous life. Morality was a serious consideration for the Egyptians, its seriousness deriving from the fact that even the individual was part of the wider order of Ma'at, and Ma'at had always required that every detail of existence should be in its proper place and function in its proper manner. Hence, the individual whose life had not been lived in accordance with what was demanded by Ma'at could expect to find no place in the wider order of existence after death. The Egyptians had never evolved what we might call a strict moral theology; there were no divinely ordained rules of conduct sanctioned by the gods; there were no detailed and specific instructions laid down to determine what the individual could and could not do. Man, nevertheless, was expected to live a good life and to conduct himself, by the exercise of his own conscience, in accordance with what was right and proper. The man who desired to be judged as morally good and righteous would not steal, lie or cheat; he would not defraud the widow, the orphan, or the poor; he would not act in any way to harm others or to offend the gods. On the contrary, he was expected to do what he could to be kind and generous to others and to be of benefit and help to those around him. There was, in fact, no need for specific moral codes to be detailed by the gods. Man had been given something far more powerful to control his life; the strength of Ma'at was seen as the ultimate force which determined the goodness of the life of any individual. We must say, to the credit of the Egyptians, that they were willing to entrust the proper conduct of one's life to the strength of the individual conscience. While moral treatises were abundant in ancient Egypt, the elaboration of such was a matter for the writers of the wisdom

³⁰ CT IV, 53e.

literature and not for the theologians who evolved the mythic systems.

Despite the absence of divinely sanctioned moral codes, the force of morality is apparent in the abundant literature which the Egyptians produced on the subject. Even in the Old Kingdom the fact of having led an upright life appears to have been a prerequisite for the eternal happiness even of the ruler. The monarchs whom the Pyramid Texts describe as joining the gods appear to do so because their lives were free from evil and because they had lived according to *Ma'at*. When the afterlife was extended to the common people after the fall of the Old Kingdom, the same moral requirements were demanded and perhaps even more strongly. We see in the Coffin Texts that the individual is accepted into the next life only because he has been judged as righteous and justified before Osiris. The so-called "Negative Confession" in Chapter CXXV of the New Kingdom Book of the Dead gives strong evidence of the necessity of having led a good life. Only the individual who was judged innocent and pure before Osiris could hope to be rewarded with eternal life.

We may summarize the Egyptian concept of the afterlife by saying that the individual whose life had been righteous and in accordance with the principle of *Ma'at* had the sure and certain hope that he would not perish eternally, but that his life would somehow continue to survive. The exact manner of that survival may not have been clear to the Egyptian, but he did have the certainty, provided by the mythic symbolism of his religion, that he would be safe after death and that he would continue to enjoy the benefits of a vital and spiritual existence. Perhaps the most simple, but nevertheless most elegant and beautiful expression of this hope is found in a Spell of the Coffin Texts where it is said that the deceased "shall eat bread among the living ones, and they shall never die."³¹

V.

Two final points remain for brief consideration, although these belong more strictly to the area of abstract theology rather than to mytho-theology. These are the questions of universal-

ism and monotheism in Egyptian thought. It has been suggested³² that even in the Pyramid Texts one can find evidence for the concept of a universal deity in Egyptian thought.³³ My own assessment on this matter is that the Egyptian mentality during the Old Kingdom was still too strongly parochial in its outlook, and that the expressions which may be taken as indicative of universalist thinking should probably be seen as no more than pious hyperbole in addressing the deity. There can be no doubt that universalism did eventually appear in Egyptian religious thought, but only during the New Kingdom after Egypt had expanded into an empire of such an extent that it became necessary for her to give due recognition to the place held by foreign nations in the universal scheme. Such universalism is clearly expressed in some pre-Amarna sun hymns, where it is centered around the Theban deity Amun-Re, and most evident in the texts from the Amarna period when the nature of the Aten required the exclusion of any other deities whatsoever. In the first instance we may assert that the universalist tendencies were in effect little more than a religious expression of the political goals and aspirations of Egypt, and that they had not in reality arisen out of any serious philosophical development within the sphere of religious thought. To be certain, the expression of such universalism must have done a great deal to increase the prestige of Amun-Re within Egypt's boundaries, but it did not result in any significant changes within the traditional mytho-theological system. The structure and content of the traditional myths remained the same, only the descriptions and epithets of Amun-Re becoming more encompassing and far-reaching. It would be rash, however, to make any claim that the Egyptian mind was now holding to any philosophical concept of the unity of all men or to the oneness and equality of all nations. Egypt's own outlook still held that she was herself the center of the universe; and little, if any, altruistic interest was evident as regarded foreign nations. As for the universalism evident in the Amarna movement, such must also be said to reflect the interest of Akhenaten in promoting

³² R. Anthes, *JNES* XVIII (1959) 191.

³³ See, for example, *PT* 305a: *nb tm* ("Lord of the totality"); *PT* 1434b: *nn dr.f* ("He who has no limit").

³¹ *CT* VII, 506.

his own god and suppressing all other possible rivals. It is here again highly doubtful, given the general religious atmosphere of the age, that Akhenaten had made such an advance in thought that he had been able to arrive at universalist attitudes such as were totally genuine and disinterested. In both cases, that of Theban thought in general and that of Akhenaten in particular, we cannot overlook the political advantages of such universalist expressions. We must, however, admit that concepts of a universal deity were not unknown in Egypt and that such did at least form an important element in cultic and liturgical expression, even though they may have had little effect on the mythic content of religion.

The question of monotheism in Egyptian thought is even more of a debatable issue. It is well known that scholars have frequently shown overly enthusiastic tendencies to demonstrate that Egypt's religion was a monotheism even in the earliest periods. It is, however, unlikely that any serious modern scholar would maintain the idea that behind the Egyptian polytheistic symbolism there was hidden a genuine monotheism. It is, of course, quite possible to see the Egyptian system of polytheistic expression for what it was, namely an expression of the unity and oneness of the divine power which upheld and supported the universe. This, however, is far removed from the abstract concept of one personal deity whose knowledge and power encompasses everything which exists. For the Egyptian to have admitted monotheistic thinking into his system would have been tantamount to denying the traditional polytheistic system of symbolism and the complexity of the divine world which was given expression in such a system. In brief, the world of Egyptian thought and the world of monotheistic thought were poles apart. Any attempt to reconcile the two and to see a monotheistic basis for Egyptian religion is to misunderstand totally the nature of that religion. To the Egyptian mind, even the term "monotheism" would have been completely irrelevant and meaningless.

In the thought of the Theban theologians of the New Kingdom, there were distinct tendencies to posit Amun-Re as the supreme deity, and in the mytho-theology of this period that same Amun-Re did hold the position of king of the gods. A supreme deity, however, cannot be

equated with a monotheistic deity, nor even with the henotheistic deity. The position of Amun-Re as king of the gods could have gone to a certain extent in the direction of henotheism, but even the latter would have required that the other deities be ignored, although not totally denied. The best we can state of traditional Egyptian thought is that the weight of the position attributed to the Theban Amun-Re may have created a deity who after a long process and after the emergence of an abstract way of thinking could have eventually evolved into a monotheistic god. Such a phenomenon, however, did not take place within Egyptian religious thought; and when monotheism was eventually found in Egypt, it was only as the result of a foreign importation. Monotheism, however, cannot be said to have been truly inherent within the native Egyptian systems.

Many have maintained the fully monotheistic nature of the religion of Akhenaten. To attempt any debate on the latter question, however, would be beyond the bounds and purposes of the present context. I would suggest, however, that the Amarna texts themselves give no real clear indication of the absolute denial of the existence of other gods. The other deities were simply ignored and, in the latter years of Akhenaten's reign, even actively persecuted. Such an action, however, may probably be best interpreted as a political move on the part of the heretic king to strengthen his own position and the position of the religious system which he advocated. His main purpose, however, was probably to break the power of the priesthood of Amun-Re which had functioned as a rival to the royal throne for well over a century. A movement to suppress the traditional mythic system of Egypt for the purpose of strengthening his own political position can hardly be viewed as a genuine monotheistic conviction on the part of Akhenaten. We must, however, admit that more favourable views of Akhenaten's movement are in existence. It has been said, for example, that his religion constituted "a more joyous acceptance of the natural world, and a more rational belief in a universal sole god."³⁴ At the opposite extreme, it has been

³⁴ C. Aldred, *Akhenaten and Nefertiti* (New York, 1973) 79.

suggested that the religion of Akhenaten, at least against the background of traditional Egyptian religion, would have been viewed as nothing else than atheism.³⁵ Such an opinion emerges naturally from the fact that in ancient Egypt myth was the only true and possible means of revelation. With the abolishment of the traditional mythic symbols, there would have remained for the Egyptian mind no means of perceiving or apprehending the divine. Akhenaten's movement was, therefore, from the Egyptian point of view no real religion at all, for it denied the reality of Egyptian mythic perception and in so doing denied the basis of Egyptian religious experience. Hence, whether or not Akhenaten's system was a monotheism is, at least in the Egyptian way of thought, a totally pointless question. The best we may say for Akhenaten is that he created an anachronism which could find no place in the mytho-theology of his day.

To conclude this survey of the mytho-theology of ancient Egypt, we must beware of making statements which are too broad and too generalized. We must not assume that there was a homogeneous outlook on life and its meaning, on the universe and the world of the divine. For the general masses, religion probably meant no more than the acknowledgement of the polytheistic deities of tradition and the observation of the cults and festivals of the state. Many must have taken the mythic symbols at their face value and interpreted them in a fundamentalist and literalistic manner. Such does not, however, alter the fact that the Egyptian mytho-theological system did contain within itself the possibility of articulating a more abstract and intellectual concept of the world of the divine, even though that articulation did remain within the sphere of concrete symbolic expression. To be certain, its value was in no way thereby diminished.

The Egyptian religious synthesis appears as an all-encompassing and all-embracing method of

perception, unifying the human experience of the universe and functioning as a true integrating force. Egyptian religion was, in effect, the articulation of unified existential being, even though the Egyptian himself would not have described it in such terminology. Since it was unhampered by the orthodoxy of dogma and doctrine, Egyptian religion was free to meet the spiritual needs of man as they were felt in the given situation. It was able to stress the mystery and the sanctity of all life without restricting itself to official definitions which could run the risk of becoming outmoded and obsolete. It was able to articulate and make real to human experience the existence of a universal and unchanging order based on Ma'at, and it thus gave the assurance that human life would be stable and secure despite the disruptions which might occur from time to time. Man could thus be free from fatalism and was able to develop an optimism which was unsurpassed in the mythologies of the ancient world. In the celebration of the myths in the cultic rituals, the worshipper was enabled to participate in the positive realities of the universe and thus feel that he was an integral part of the wider system. As such, his well-being and his survival were assured both in the present world and even after death. Even though he could not precisely define the structure and nature of existence, he did have the assurance that his own life was integrated into the wider cosmic order of universal life.

The concepts expressed in the Egyptian mytho-theological synthesis may thus be seen as valid theological statements such as can affirm the most positive aspects of the universe and of life itself. If the Egyptian believed in any doctrine of dogma, it was the simple yet profound truth that life is sacred and eternal. One may well wonder if the most profound abstract theological system can offer more than that.

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³⁵ D. B. Redford, *Akhenaten, the Heretic King* (Princeton, 1984) 244.



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The Osiris Nefertari: A Case Study of Decorum, Gender, and Regeneration¹

HEATHER LEE MCCARTHY

The funerary art and literature of the ancient Egyptians clearly demonstrate that they envisioned an afterlife existence that emulated two parallel, but interpenetrating, mythic paradigms—the “solar” and “Osirian” modes of regeneration. These two modes have temporal aspects that correspond with, respectively, *nḥh* (cyclical, repetitive) eternity and *dt* (linear, static) eternity.²

Like the solar deity, the deceased was cyclically reborn and renewed—a process that the Egyptians equated with the sun’s celestial journey through the daytime sky and the darkness of the netherworld. The climax of this process was the re-emergence of the sun and the souls of the deceased from the netherworld into the world of the living every morning.³

The cyclical journey that characterized the solar mode of regeneration also had a parallel sexual component wherein the sun god was reborn via intercourse with a goddess who had a tripartite, multigenerational aspect.⁴ This goddess was the solar deity’s daughter.⁵ She also acted as his consort and was impregnated by him in the west at sunset. The goddess then became his mother when she gave birth to the renewed and regenerated version of the same solar deity in the east at dawn.⁶ This notion was expressed pictorially and textually in both anthropomorphic and topographical terms—the sun disk enters, gestates and leaves the body of the sky goddess or enters the western horizon and re-emerges from the eastern horizon⁷ (the cosmographic correlate of the goddess’s vagina).

The deceased was also associated with Osiris, the god of the *Duat* (the netherworld). Like Osiris, one aspect of the deceased—the physical body—dwelled in the *Duat* (correlated to the burial chamber

¹ This article is an expanded version of a paper presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt, held in Providence, Rhode Island. I would like to thank David O’Connor, Ann Macy Roth, and an anonymous reader for their comments. I would also like to thank Stephen Harvey for acting as my proxy at the conference and reading the original version of this paper in my absence.

² Edward F. Wente, “Funerary Beliefs of the Ancient Egyptians,” *Expedition* 24 (Winter 1982), 17–26, especially pp. 22–24; Erik Hornung, “Zum ägyptischen Ewigkeitsbegriff,” *Fuf* 39 (1965), 334–36; Erik Hornung, trans. by John Baines, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many* (Ithaca, 1990), 93–96, 183; Jan Assman, *Zeit und Ewigkeit im alten Ägypten* (Heidelberg, 1975), 35–48.

³ Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt*, 181.

⁴ Lana Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History* (Uppsala, 1986), 25–30.

⁵ Troy, *Patterns of Queenship*, 23–24.

⁶ Troy, *Patterns of Queenship*, 27; Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge and London, 1993), 17, 41. Robins notes that Kamutef, the aspect of the king as the “bull of his mother,” is a manifestation of this mythic paradigm.

⁷ The anthropomorphic aspect of this notion is expressed by illustrations from the *Book of the Day* and the *Book of the Night*, which appear on ceilings of Ramesside royal tombs and depict the sun traveling through and emerging from the body of the sky-goddess. The best-known example of this theme is on the painted sarcophagus chamber ceiling of Ramesses VI. See Erik Hornung, trans. by David Warburton, *Valley of the Kings: Horizon of Eternity* (New York, 1990), 89, pls. 54, 55, 68, 70. A vignette depicting one pair of feminine arms (with a pair of attached breasts) holding the sun disk illustrates the combination of anthropomorphic and topographical aspects of the western horizon, 59, 90; see also Alexander Piankoff, “The Sky Goddess Nut and the Night Journey of the Sun,” *JEA* 20 (1934), 57–61.

of the tomb⁸) and awaited nightly rebirth and renewal effected by a syncretic union with the solar deity.⁹ The union between Osiris and the sun god was a temporary but very important occurrence during which, in James Allen's words, "from Osiris the sun received the power of new life, and through the sun Osiris was enabled to live again."¹⁰ In New Kingdom funerary texts, this event, which occurs in the midst of the netherworld, was a critical moment in this process—an event that recharged the battery of the regenerative mechanism.

The Pyramid Texts provide unequivocal written evidence that, at least as far back as the Fifth Dynasty, deceased pharaohs were automatically equated with both the sun god¹¹ and Osiris¹² by virtue of their kingly status and were believed to experience the corresponding modes of regeneration and renewal.¹³ The Pyramid Texts of Neith¹⁴ and Wedjebten,¹⁵ wives of Pepy II, verify that deceased royal women were also associated with the solar deity and Osiris and had the epithet "Osiris" prefixed to their names from as far back as the late Sixth Dynasty.¹⁶

David O'Connor's¹⁷ analyses of the programs of two late Old Kingdom elite tombs and Janice Kamrin's¹⁸ study of a Middle Kingdom elite tomb persuasively demonstrate that the afterlife existence of non-royal male Egyptians was determined by the same mythic paradigms that structure the afterlife existence of kings. Non-royal men and non-royal women are explicitly associated with Osiris and given the epithet "Osiris" from the Heracleopolitan Period onward.¹⁹ In addition, female family members (mothers, wives, and daughters) depicted in the tomb programs of elite men could be envisioned playing the same sexual, multigenerational role for the deceased male Egyptian that the tripartite goddess played for the solar deity.²⁰

Less straightforward, however, is the process by which women (either royal or elite) were regenerated. Although deceased women were explicitly associated with Osiris and the solar deity from the Old Kingdom onwards,²¹ it has never been entirely clear whether the afterlife existence of women

⁸ James P. Allen, "Reading a Pyramid," in *Hommages à Jean Leclant*. BdE 106 (Paris, 1994), 5–28, especially pp. 24–25 and fig. 5.

⁹ Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt*, 155–56.

¹⁰ James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (Cambridge, 2000), 95.

¹¹ See Raymond O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford, 1969), 76, 133, 158–59, and 225 for Spells 267, 407, 469, and 570, respectively; Erik Hornung, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife* (Ithaca, 1999), 6.

¹² Especially Pyramid Texts spell 219. Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, 46–48; Hornung, *Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife*, 6.

¹³ There was also a third mode of afterlife existence in which the deceased king unites with the northern circumpolar stars. This mode coexists with Osirian and solar modes of regeneration in the Pyramid Texts. However, the change from the north-south orientation of Djoser's mortuary complex to the east-west orientation of the pyramids from the beginning of the Fourth Dynasty onwards, suggests that the association with the northern circumpolar stars becomes subordinate to the solar mode. See Alan J. Spencer, *Death in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1982), 82–83, 140.

¹⁴ Gustave Jéquier, *Les Pyramides des Reines Neit et Apout* (Cairo, 1933), 14–28, pls. 7–32.

¹⁵ Gustave Jéquier, *La Pyramide D'Oudjebten* (Cairo, 1928), 5–8, pls. 3, 6–12.

¹⁶ Henry G. Fischer, *Egyptian Women of the Old Kingdom and Heracleopolitan Period*. Second Edition (New York, 2000), 17.

¹⁷ David O'Connor discusses the Sixth Dynasty elite tomb of Pepyankh at Meir in, "Sexuality, Statuary and the Afterlife: Scenes in the Tomb-chapel of Pepyankh (Heny the Black)," in Peter Der Manuelian (ed.) and Rita Freed (supervisor), *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson*. Volume 2 (Boston, 1996), 621–33; Pepyankh is discussed again in idem, "Society and Individual in Early Egypt," in Janet Richards and Mary Van Buren (eds.), *Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth in Ancient States* (Cambridge, 2000), 21–35, especially p. 3; Mereruka's Sixth Dynasty tomb at Saqqara is discussed in idem, "Eros in Egypt," in *Archaeology Odyssey* (September/October 2001), 42–51, especially pp. 49–50.

¹⁸ Janice Kamrin presents a cosmological analysis of the Middle Kingdom provincial elite tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hasan in, *The Cosmos of Khnumhotep* (London, 1999), especially pp. 10, 88, 139–40, 142, 147–52, 154–56, 167–68.

¹⁹ Henry G. Fischer, "A Stela of the Heracleopolitan Period at Saqqara: the Osiris 'Iti,'" *ZÄS* 90 (1963), 35–41, especially pp. 36ff. and pl. 6; idem, *Egyptian Women*, 17.

²⁰ Gay Robins, "Ancient Egyptian Sexuality," in *Discussions in Egyptology* 11 (1988), 61–72, especially pp. 61–65.

²¹ Except for a few later burials where the deceased woman is identified with Hathor instead. See Ann Macy Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs about Conception and Fertility," in Alison E. Rautman (ed.), *Reading the Body: Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record* (Philadelphia, 2000), 187–201 and especially, p. 199; For examples of Hathor-identified women, see Sue D'Auria, Peter Lacovara, Catherine Roehrig (eds.), *Mummies and Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt* (Boston, 1987), 76–77, 98–99, 118–19, 156, 162–65, 169–70, 173–75, 187–89.

involved a sexual mode of regeneration, and, if so, how this process was enacted. A deceased woman could be identified with Osiris and the solar deity, and while she might be represented in her husband's or her father's tomb playing the role of the tripartite goddess for her deceased male relatives, it is not clear whether she needed a tripartite goddess figure to make her rebirth and regeneration possible. If a deceased woman needed such assistance, who played the role of the tripartite goddess?

A phenomenon recently discussed by Ann Macy Roth²² may provide a clue to understanding this process. Roth has observed that, with some exceptions,²³ the tomb chapels owned by royal²⁴ and non-royal women—or the cult places reserved for women in jointly owned tombs—omitted the figure (and sometimes the name²⁵) of the husband. In her examination of this pattern, Roth refers, at one point, to the conspicuous absence of Ramesses II from the tomb of Nefertari²⁶ (in fact, the Rameside royal women's tombs in the Valley of the Queens, as a rule, completely omit the names or images of their royal male kin,²⁷ even though queens, like kings, could be depicted in the tombs of royal sons²⁸).

While Roth does not suggest an explanation for this particular omission, she makes a keen observation, namely, that in stark contrast to the exclusion of Ramesses II from his wife's tomb, New Kingdom pharaohs are frequently depicted in the tombs of their sons.²⁹ She argues that the "absent husband" phenomenon in this case was not directed by a proscription against depicting higher status individuals within the tombs of lower-status deceased family members.³⁰ The logical inference of Roth's statement is that relative status alone did not determine whether a king was portrayed in the tombs of his relatives. For if status alone were the determinant, then one would not expect to see representations of the king (or queens, for that matter) in the princes' tombs, either.

The purpose of the present article is to offer a possible solution to the question of how royal women were regenerated by using the Theban tomb (QV 66) of Nefertari, the most prominent of the

²² Ann Macy Roth, "The Absent Spouse: Patterns and Taboos in Egyptian Tomb Decoration," *JARCE* 36 (1999), 37–53.

²³ In the late Third or early Fourth Dynasty tomb of Atet at Meydum, the figure of her husband, Nefermaat, is shown trapping birds. The figure of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep appears in the late Eleventh Dynasty tombs of Queen Neferu and in the chapels of the six royal women buried in Mentuhotep's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari. See Roth, "Absent Spouse," 45, 48–49.

²⁴ Royal women of the Old through Middle Kingdoms tend to be buried in close proximity to (or within) the pyramid enclosure of the king, even when they have separate tombs and pyramids. It is not until the beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasty that royal women have both a separate necropolis—the Valley of the Queens in western Thebes—and large, very elaborately decorated tombs of their own. This practice seems to be exclusive to the Rameside Period. Hatshepsut and Tawosret, royal women of the Eighteenth and late Nineteenth Dynasty, respectively, should be regarded as special cases because they each assumed the role and titles of a pharaoh and were given kings' burials in the Valley of the Kings.

²⁵ Roth, "Absent Spouse," 47. A section of the early Sixth Dynasty tomb of the vizier Mereruka at Saqqara is devoted entirely to his wife, Watetkhethor, a king's daughter, and neither Mereruka's name nor his image appears there. The name, but not the image, of Pepi II appears in the tombs of his wives.

²⁶ Roth, "Absent Spouse," 49; see also Colin Campbell, *Two Theban Queens: Nefertari and Tyti and Their Tombs* (London, 1909), 7, 12. Campbell notes the absence of Ramesses II (in both text and image) from Nefertari's tomb, but he offers no analysis.

²⁷ Hornung acknowledges this pattern in *Valley of the Kings*, p. 187. The single exception to this rule is found in the twentieth Dynasty tomb of Queen Isis (QV 51). Isis's son, Ramesses VI, completed his mother's tomb and inscribed his cartouches on the jambs of the doorway leading from the antechamber to the sarcophagus chamber.

²⁸ See Christian Leblanc, *Ta Set Neferou: Une Nécropole de Thebes-Ouest et Son Histoire* (Cairo, 1989), pl. 85, for a scene showing a royal woman offering to Osiris in the Twentieth Dynasty tomb of Prince Pareherwenemef (QV 42).

²⁹ Roth, "Absent Spouse," 49. The examples Roth cites are the Twentieth Dynasty tombs of the sons of Ramesses III in the Valley of the Queens. Her observation is still applicable to the period discussed here, because images and cartouches of Ramesses II are prominently displayed in the decorative program of KV 5, the "family mausoleum" which served as the burial place for a number of this king's sons. In many scenes, the king mediates between his sons and the gods just as Ramesses III does in the tombs of his sons. See Edwin C. Brock, "Wall Decoration," in Kent Weeks, ed., *KV 5: A Preliminary Report on the Excavation of the Tomb of the Sons of Rameses II in the Valley of the Kings* (Cairo, 2000), 55–94, especially figs. 45–49, 56, 60, 61a–c, 62, 69b.

³⁰ Roth, "Absent Spouse," 49.

great royal wives of Ramesses II, as a case study. I will address Roth's observation, which usefully acknowledges the complexity of the "absent spouse" pattern, but will also take this idea further and define the multiple factors—including hierarchical decorum³¹—that seem to have shaped the notion of how Nefertari embarked upon her afterlife existence and how this phenomenon was expressed in visual terms.

The main thesis of this study is that Nefertari's postmortem regeneration required her to attain a temporary state of gender fluidity in which she becomes both male and female.³² The attainment of this state necessitated the absence of Ramesses II from her tomb. Once the queen adopted a masculine aspect and achieved a state of gender fluidity, she could then assimilate with both Osiris and the solar deity. This would allow her to assume the chthonic fertility of Osiris and to be reborn via what is essentially a sexual mode of regeneration (like the solar deity)—possibly interacting with her own feminine aspect in the process.

Furthermore, this article will demonstrate how the mechanism of the queen's rebirth and regeneration—effected through her assumption of masculine regenerative potential and her assimilation with both Osiris and the solar deity—is conveyed by the art in her tomb. An attempt will be made to show how Egyptian notions of male and female fertility, hierarchical decorum, and the ideological role of royal women within the conceptual framework of kingship³³ propelled specific choices made in the design and content of the decorative program, among which is the aforementioned omission of Ramesses II.

To this end, the decorative program of the Small Temple at Abu Simbel,³⁴ where Nefertari and a local, Nubian form of the goddess Hathor were the foci of cult, will be studied and used as a comparandum. The decorative program of the Small Temple provides an instructive demonstration of the rules of hierarchical decorum that govern depictions of the royal couple's dyadic relationship. The rationale for comparing this temple with Nefertari's tomb is that both of these monuments have exceptionally well-preserved programs and are dedicated to the same royal woman. They thus provide an unusually rich source of data about modes of representation deemed appropriate for the portrayal of a queen in both temple/cultic and funerary/cultic contexts. Moreover, the rules of subordination and superordination employed in the representations of the royal couple in the Small Temple help explain both the omission of Ramesses II from the tomb of Nefertari and the larger process of the queen's regeneration.

Among the works cited in this discussion are Roth's two recent, thought-provoking articles, "The Absent Spouse: Patterns and Taboos in Ancient Egyptian Tomb Decoration," and "Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs about Conception and Fertility."³⁵ The former deals with the previously mentioned "absent spouse" pattern in tomb decoration, and the latter examines the Egyptian conception of fertility and the role of ancient Egyptian women in death and rebirth. Lana Troy's book *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History*, is an important work demonstrating that ancient Egyptian queenship can be envisioned as the feminine half of the androgynous totality

³¹ For a discussion of the notion of gender-related compositional dominance and its canonical employment in Egyptian art see Gay Robins, "Some Principles of Compositional Dominance and Gender Hierarchy in Egyptian Art," in *JARCE* 31 (1994), 33–40.

³² Roth first proposed the hypothesis that deceased women assumed a masculine postmortem identity in addition to their feminine identity, developed an association with Osiris, and re-engendered themselves with the help of their own tomb images in "Father Earth, Mother Sky," 199–200.

³³ Troy, *Patterns of Queenship*. The ideological roles of royal women vis-à-vis kingship and within the overarching cosmological frame of reference are two important concepts examined in this innovative and original study of royal women in ancient Egypt.

³⁴ A comprehensive publication of the decorative program and architecture of this temple is provided by Christine Desroches-Noblecourt and Charles Kuentz, *Le Petit Temple d'Abou Simbel*, volumes 1,2 (Cairo, 1968).

³⁵ Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky," 187–201.

of kingship. Another work cited here, Gay Robins' 1994 *JARCE* article, "Some Principles of Compositional Dominance and Gender Hierarchy in Egyptian Art," explores the relationship of gender to patterns of hierarchical decorum in two and three-dimensional art.

The first part of this article will describe the tomb of Nefertari and discuss its program, its functions, and its cosmographic significance. The second section will examine the decorative program of the Small Temple of Abu Simbel in order to demonstrate how the rules governing the representations of Ramesses II and Nefertari in this temple help explain the absence of the king from Nefertari's tomb. The final section will discuss how the art in QV 66 provides important clues to understanding the mechanism of the queen's regeneration.

The Tomb of Nefertari³⁶

An examination of the cosmography of the architecture and decorative program of QV 66 illustrates the tomb's two primary purposes: 1) to enable the deceased queen to enter the netherworld and 2) to revitalize her and thus allow her to emerge from the tomb and return to the world of the living on a daily basis.³⁷ These two functions, which are analogous to the two phases of the sun's journey through the netherworld and the daytime sky, are conveyed by the architecture and decoration of the tomb. Moreover, the tomb consists of two distinct components.³⁸ The first is an upper level that, in the cosmography of the tomb, is conceptually equivalent to the *Akhet* and its immediate environs, a liminal zone that the deceased and the solar deity traversed in order to enter and exit the netherworld.³⁹ The second part is a lower-lying burial chamber that is the cosmographic equivalent of the *Duat* (the netherworld realm of Osiris and the dead). A descending corridor, acting as a conceptual and physical link between the two realms, connects both sections of the tomb.

Located on the northern flank of the Y-shaped "Valley of the Queens" in western Thebes, the tomb of Nefertari (figs. 1,2) lies on an approximate north-south axis with its entrance in the south. From the doorway, a descending staircase leads to the square first room—Chamber C.⁴⁰ On the eastern side of Chamber C, a doorway leads to a complex comprised of two shallow recesses (D and E on this plan), a short passageway (F), and a rectangular chamber (G). A doorway in the north (rear) wall of Chamber C, gives access to a steeply downward-sloping corridor, which lies on a diagonal, east-leaning, axis,⁴¹ and descends to the burial chamber (K). Four piers support the burial chamber, and a rectangular depression (oriented east-west) in the center of the room intended for the placement of the queen's

³⁶ Published by Hans Goedicke and Gertrud Thausing in *Nofretari: Documentation of Her Tomb and Its Decoration* (Graz, 1971).

³⁷ Christian Leblanc, "Architecture et Évolution Chronologique des Tombes de la Vallée des Reines," *BIFAO* 89 (1989), 227–47, especially pp. 245–47.

³⁸ Heike C. Schmidt, "Die Transfiguration der Nefertari: Ein Leben im Glanz der Sonne," in Heike C. Schmidt and J. Willeitner (eds.), *Nefertari: Gemahlin Ramses' II.* (Mainz, 1994), 104–44; idem, "Szenarium der Transfiguration—Kulisse des Mythos: Das Grab der Nefertari," *SAK* 22 (1995), 237–70. Schmidt offers an interpretive discussion of Nefertari's tomb that suggests the juxtaposition of solar and chthonic modes of regeneration. She envisions the areas on the (relative) north-south axis that run in a relatively straight line from Chamber C, through the corridor, and into the burial chamber, as a thematically chthonic area, whereas the east-west axis (referred to as D-G in the present article) is more solar in its orientation. Her interpretation differs from mine, because I envision a greater conceptual integration between the spaces rather than drawing a sharp distinction between the "solar complex" of the east-west axis and the more chthonic, "Osirian" axis of the north-south spaces. In addition, I envision Chamber C as an area that evokes the *Akhet*, and she does not; Goedicke notes only that there is a thematic distinction between the more "earth-connected" upper chambers and the "strictly sepulchral sphere" of the sarcophagus chamber (with the descending corridor acting as the midpoint) in, *Nofretari*, 36.

³⁹ For Allen's definition of the *Akhet* see, *Reading a Pyramid*, 26.

⁴⁰ All letter designations used in this article to distinguish spatial units in QV 66 follow those employed in John K. McDonald, *House of Eternity: The Tomb of Nefertari* (Los Angeles, 1996).

⁴¹ Hornung believes that the slightly bent axis of QV 66's corridor is a "diminished" version of the bent-axis royal tomb plan revived by Ramesses II for his own tomb. See *Valley of the Kings*, 187.

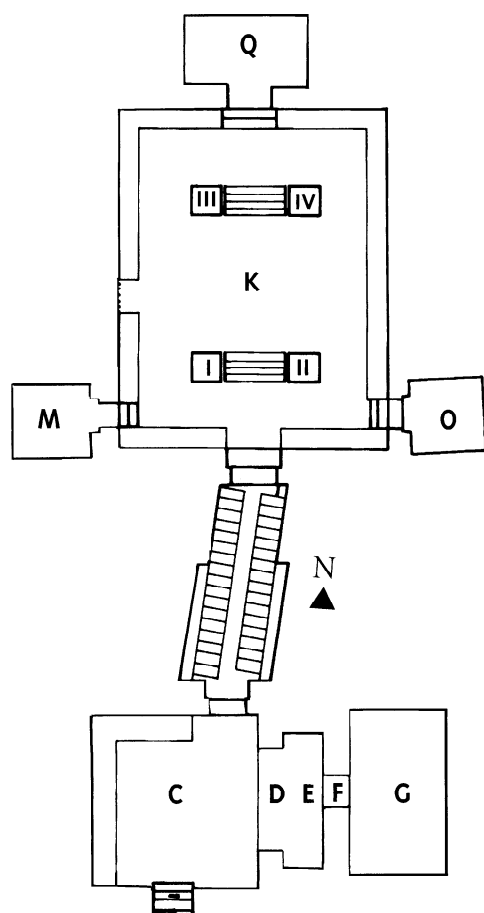


Fig. 1. Plan of Nefertari's tomb (QV 66) in western Thebes (drawing © the J. Paul Getty Trust, [1990])

sarcophagus lies between these piers. Three small annexes (M, O, and Q) open up from the lateral and rear walls of the burial chamber.

Chamber C is the conceptual and temporal correlate of the *Akhet* in this phase of the deceased queen's journey—a cosmographically appropriate designation for a chamber that communicates with the entrance doorway and the world of the living. The most powerful evidence supporting this interpretation is the decoration on the soffit of the entrance doorway (fig. 3), which depicts the sun, flanked by Isis and Nephthys in kite form, rising (or setting) in the midst of the mountains of the horizon as though it were emerging from (or entering) the tomb.⁴² In addition to graphically depicting the process of the sun's (and by association, the deceased's) emergence from the netherworld, it literally spells out the word "*Akhet*." Moreover, the position of this scene on the tomb's entrance doorway identifies Chamber C as the area hidden (from humans) behind the "mountain" or physical horizon, the hidden space that is the *Akhet*.

Furthermore, the west wall of Chamber C is decorated with the text of *Book of the Dead* chapter 17 and accompanying vignettes, which depict Nefertari undergoing transformations that will allow her to emerge from her tomb "as a living soul"⁴³ and thus re-enter the terrestrial zone outside of the tomb.⁴⁴ A representation of Nefertari as a human-headed *ba*-bird (fig. 4) perched atop the tomb (one of the transformations described in the text) graphically highlights this notion. The *ba*-spirit, as described in New Kingdom funerary texts, is the mobile aspect of the deceased that can leave the tomb during the day and mingle

with the living or travel with the solar deity.⁴⁵ This tableau places the action within the *Akhet* (and its placement on this wall further reinforces the equation of Chamber C with the *Akhet*). It graphically highlights the idea that Nefertari is experiencing the mysteries of regeneration within the *Akhet* behind the mountains of the horizon as the sun god does.

The east wall of Chamber C is decorated with representations of Osiris-Wennefer and Anubis standing in shrines and facing south, toward the tomb entrance, where Nefertari, standing adjacent

⁴² The notion that this tableau represents both the rising and setting of the sun and the inward and outward movement of the deceased is supported by Leblanc, "Architecture et Évolution," 245 and 246, fig. 7; Goedicke interprets this scene as a depiction of the setting sun in *Nofretari*, 38, as does McDonald in *House of Eternity*, 57.

⁴³ See the translation of Chapter 17 (especially the beginning, which is particularly relevant to the physical transformation of Nefertari) in R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (London, 1989), 44.

⁴⁴ Leblanc endorses the notion that the upper chamber is an area of entry, transfiguration, and re-emergence in "Architecture et Évolution," 244 and 246, fig. 7. Another point of view is held by Goedicke, who envisions the decorative program in the first chamber as a one-way entry of the deceased into the realm of Osiris. Goedicke discusses the "inaugural" character of the outer chamber in *Nofretari*, 35, but does not address the notion of the "re-emergence" or exit of the transformed deceased.

⁴⁵ See John H. Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* (Chicago and London, 2001), 20–23.

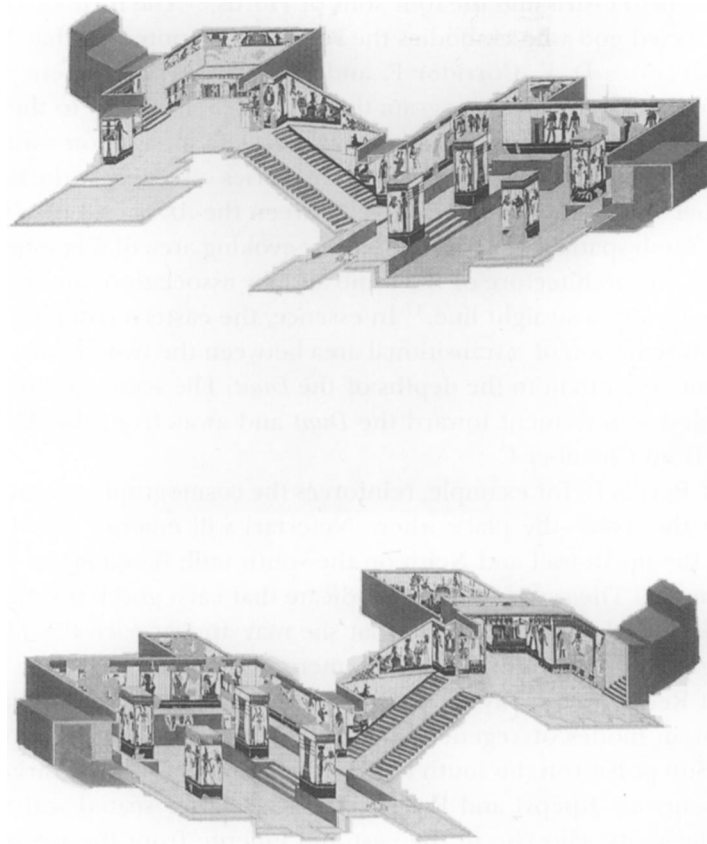


Fig. 2. Axonometric drawings of QV 66 showing the west half of the tomb (top) and east half (bottom) (after Schmidt, "Die Transfiguration der Nefertari," 108, Abb. 150 a,b)

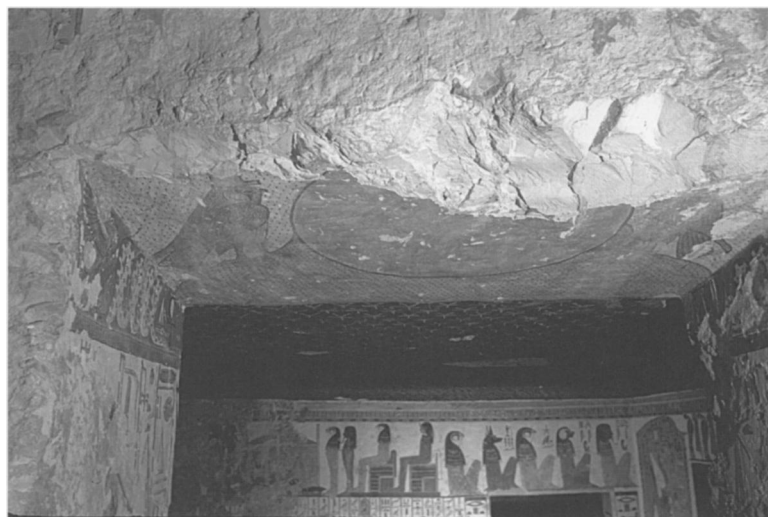


Fig. 3. The representation of the Akhet on the soffit of the entrance doorway (photograph © the J. Paul Getty Trust, [1986])

to the doorway, offers to Osiris and the four sons of Horus.⁴⁶ The form of Osiris shown is that of the revived and resurrected god who embodies the regenerative potential that Nefertari will assume.

The complex (Recesses D, E, Corridor F, and Chamber G) that opens up from the east wall of Chamber C (fig. 5) has a decorative program that relates thematically to the intersection of the solar and Osirian modes of regeneration and stresses Nefertari's interaction with these two modes. Moreover, the program of this complex suggests that this series of spaces is the cosmographic correlate of a zone in the netherworld that lies somewhere between the *Akhet* and the *Duat*. Its placement in the upper level of the tomb spatially links it to the *Akhet*-evoking area of Chamber C. Like the topography of the netherworld, the architecture of the tomb and, by association, the route taken by the deceased (in both directions) is not a straight line.⁴⁷ In essence, the eastern complex can be envisioned as the cosmographic representation of a transitional area between the two realms, but one that seems more closely linked to the *Akhet* than to the depths of the *Duat*. The scenes and inscriptions of the eastern complex also suggest a movement toward the *Duat* and away from the *Akhet* as one moves further into the complex from Chamber C.

The program of Recess D, for example, reinforces the cosmographic equivalence of the upper level of the tomb with the *Akhet*—the place where Nefertari will emerge like the sun from the *Duat*. It depicts Selket on the north wall and Neith on the south wall, flanking the passage from Chamber C to the eastern complex. The associated texts indicate that each goddess welcomes Nefertari and have accorded her a place in the sacred land so that she may appear each day like Re—a reference to the solar mode of regeneration and to Nefertari's emergence from the *Akhet*.

The program of Recess E (directly behind—and to the east—of D) highlights the interpenetration of the solar and Osirian modes of regeneration. This is accomplished by depicting Isis (on the north wall) and Horus, Son-of-Isis (on the south wall), representatives of the Osirian mythos, leading Nefertari into the presence of Khepri and Re-Horakhty (the latter seated with Hathor of Thebes), two aspects of the solar deity who rise in the east and emerge from the netherworld. The pilasters of Recess E (flanking the doorway) are decorated with representations of Osiris as a *djed*-pillar—further suggesting the interconnection between Osiris and the sun god.

The lateral walls of Corridor F (the narrow passage between Recess E and Chamber G) are each decorated with standing, west-facing figures of Ma'at, who welcomes Nefertari and assures her a place within Iu-geret.⁴⁸ This recess can be equated with the judgment of the deceased in chapter 125 of the *Book of the Dead*;⁴⁹ an analogy that suggests this corridor represents a further point in the journey between the *Akhet* and the *Duat*.⁵⁰

Indeed, there appears to be a conceptual transition between spaces (E and G) where the synthesis of the solar and Osirian modes is expressed in increasingly unequivocal terms, as Chamber G explicitly depicts the intertwining of the solar and Osirian modes of regeneration that Nefertari

⁴⁶ Schmidt believes that this vignette is the illustration of *Book of the Dead* chapter 173 in "Das Grab der Nefertari," 241–42.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the non-linear topography of the netherworld and its expression in Old Kingdom Pyramid architecture, see Allen, "Reading a Pyramid," 24–28; idem, "The Cosmology of the Pyramid Texts," in *Yale Egyptological Studies* 3 (New Haven, 1989), 1–28, especially his discussion of the location of the Field of Reeds, Field of Offerings, and the *Akhet* on pp. 6, 17–18.

⁴⁸ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nefertari*, 42–43.

⁴⁹ McDonald, *House of Eternity*, 75; Schmidt, "Das Grab der Nefertari," 245; see Leblanc, *Ta Set Neferou*, pl. 147 (B) for a representation of the "negative confessions" portion of chapter 125 in the antechamber of the tomb (QV 60) of Nebettawy, Ramesses II's daughter by Nefertari or Isisnofret.

⁵⁰ Leblanc envisions the eastern complex as the place where the "triumph of the deceased" occurs during the journey from the *Duat* to the *Akhet* (although not the other way around) in "Architecture et Évolution Chronologique des Tombes de la Vallée des Reines," 246, fig. 7 and 247. While this supports the notion that the recess is a zone of transition, I would suggest that the eastern complex might have been significant for the deceased's inward and outward movement through the tomb.



Fig. 4. Nefertari playing draughts and depicted as human-headed ba-bird on the west half of the south wall of Chamber C (photograph © the J. Paul Getty Trust, [1992])

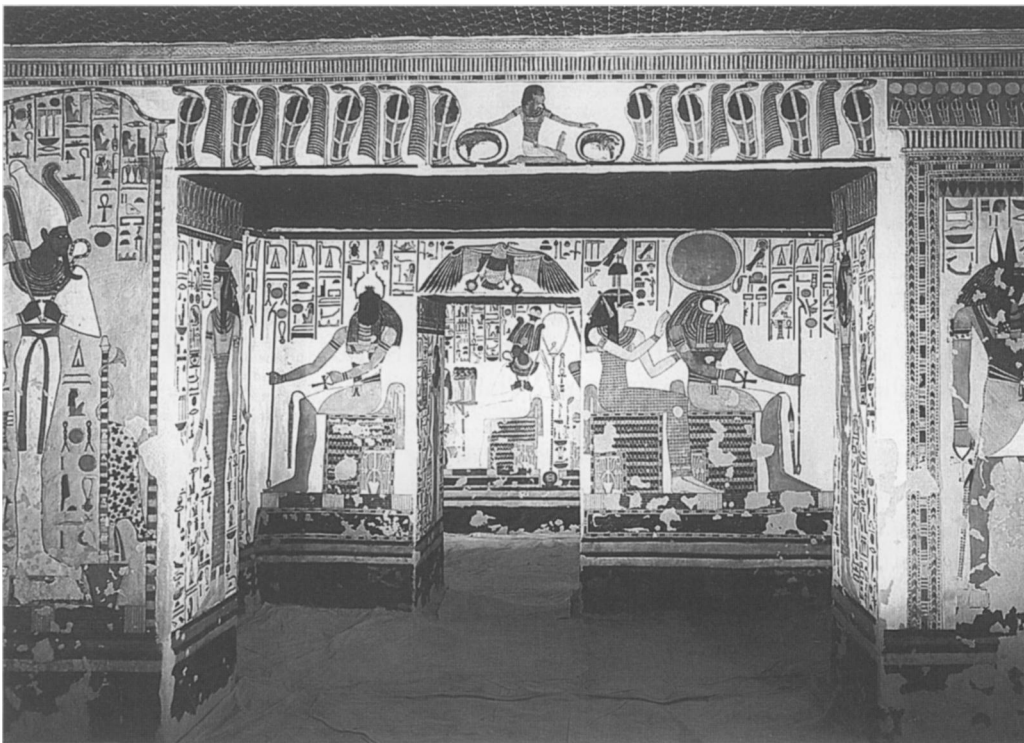


Fig. 5. Complex of spaces that open up from the eastern wall of Chamber C (photograph © the J. Paul Getty Trust, [1992])

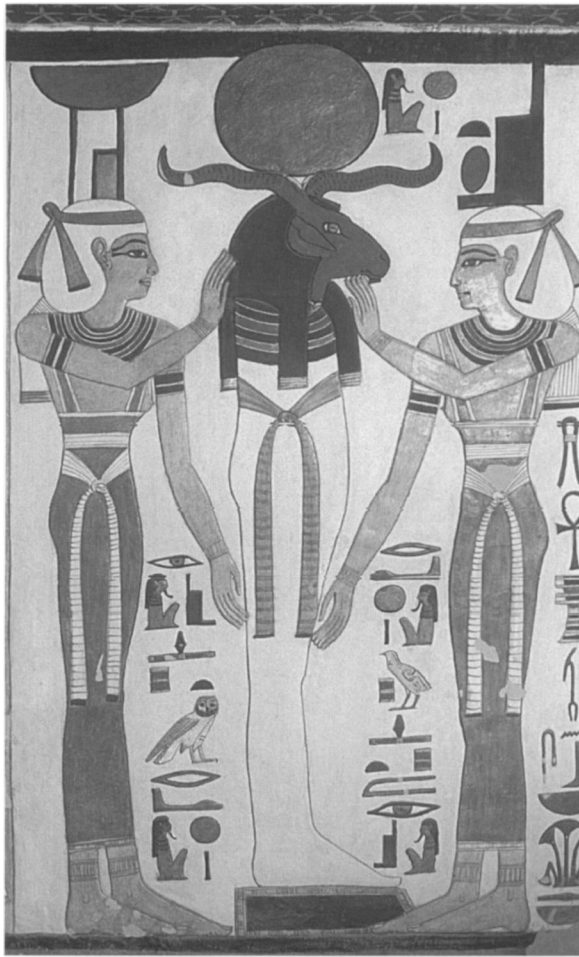


Fig. 6. Syncretic form of Re-Osiris from the south half of the east wall of Chamber G (photograph © the J. Paul Getty Trust, [1992])

would hope to undergo in her personal postmortem transformation. The program of Chamber G also includes scenes and texts from the *Book of the Dead* that have a direct bearing on Nefertari's physical journey through the afterlife. The west wall of Chamber G (on the south side of the door) is perhaps the most telling example of the intensification of the program's message. The vignette here depicts the syncretistic, mummiform figure of Re-Osiris flanked by Isis and Nephthys (fig. 6)—an illustration of chapter 180 from the *Book of the Dead*⁵¹ in which the interaction of Re and Osiris “recharges” the process of regeneration and empowers the deceased to move both into and out of the realm of the dead.⁵²

Versions of the Re-Osiris scene are included in the tombs of two other Ramesside queens: Nebettawy (QV 60), a daughter of Ramesses II, and Duatentipet (QV 74).⁵³ In both of these tombs, this scene appears in a space that architecturally corresponds to QV 66's Chamber G (i.e., in an eastern lateral chamber that opens up from the east wall of each tomb's antechamber, but in each case without QV 66's associated recesses).

The scenes on the south wall of the chamber illustrate chapter 148, a spell that provides both nourishment for the deceased and the magical steering oars that will guide her on her journey and protect her from her enemies. The north wall depicts chapter 94, in which the deceased requests writing equipment from Thoth that will endow her with the scribal proficiency she needs to successfully

complete her journey. The adjacent scene on the north half of the west wall (on the north side of the door) depicts the queen offering bolts linen to Ptah while he, in turn, provides her with protection, life, and stability.

The rear (east) wall shows two back-to-back scenes of the deceased offering to Osiris-Wennefer, the resurrected Osiris, and to Atum, the solar/creator deity of Heliopolis (fig. 7). The pairing of the gods, like the representation of Re-Osiris on the west wall, is a graphic visual statement of the coexistence and interaction of the two complementary modes of regeneration. Furthermore, in the asso-

⁵¹ Hornung, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife*, 140.

⁵² Faulkner, *Book of the Dead*, 177.

⁵³ In Nebettawy's tomb (QV60) this scene is located on the north half of the west wall of the east lateral chamber, and the scene is on the east wall of the east lateral chamber of Duatentipet's tomb (QV 74). Leblanc, *Ta Set Neferou*, pls. 149 (A), 195 (B); Bertha Porter and Rosalind L. B. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings: I. The Theban Necropolis, Part 2. Royal Tombs and Smaller Cemeteries* (Oxford, 1964), 761 (10), 768 (6).



Fig. 7. Osiris-Wennenefer and Atum from the east wall of Chamber G (photograph © the J. Paul Getty Trust, [1992])

ciated texts, Osiris and Atum explicitly endow Nefertari with the ability to access both regenerative modes.⁵⁴

The descending corridor not only serves as a point of departure that separates the mostly *Akhet*-evoking upper chambers from the explicitly *Duat*-evoking burial chamber but also serves as a transitional zone in which one realm abuts and then dissolves into the next.⁵⁵ While the upper half of the corridor is decorated with scenes that are not explicitly funerary (and at times even evoke the terrestrial realm), the lower half of the corridor evokes the *Duat* through the funerary content of its texts and decoration and through the spatial arrangement of its architecture. The lower half of the corridor, unlike the upper half, lies beneath the floor level of the upper chambers. The “underground” location of the lower half of the corridor thus intensifies the decorative program’s equation of the lower half of the corridor with the *Duat*.⁵⁶

The thicknesses of the upper doorway are decorated with the queen’s cartouches and symbols of Upper and Lower Egypt⁵⁷—direct evocations of the terrestrial (i.e., Egyptian) realm. The side walls of the upper part of the corridor are decorated with two pendant offering scenes in which Nefertari consecrates *nemset*-jars, produce, and bread to two enthroned goddesses—Hathor and Selket on the east and Isis and Nephthys on the west (a figure of Ma’at kneels behind the second goddess in each group). Two recesses that separate the upper and lower zones of the corridor are decorated with anthropomorphized *Djed*-pillars that appear to support the ceiling.

Both lateral walls of the lower section of the corridor are decorated with scenes that more directly evoke the netherworld than do the scenes on the upper part. On each side, the Anubis-jackal sits on a shrine, with a winged cobra protecting the cartouche of Nefertari above, while Isis (on the west side) and Nephthys (on the east side) kneel on a hieroglyphic sign for gold, and hold a shen sign.⁵⁸ The associated inscriptions, though not chapters from the *Book of the Dead*, relate to the queen’s after-life existence. They express the wish that Nefertari have a place in the “sacred land” [*T3 dsr*], appear in heaven like Re, and rest on the throne of Osiris⁵⁹—once again reflecting the interpenetration of Osirian and solar modes of regeneration.

Even the queen’s epithets, inscribed on the two doorways of the corridor, suggest Nefertari’s physical movement to (and from) the netherworld and her transformation through this transitional zone

⁵⁴ Goedicke, *Nofretari*, pl. 39.

⁵⁵ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, 45. Goedicke envisions the corridor’s program as showing “two aspects and stages in the funerary development.”

⁵⁶ Goedicke, *Nofretari*, 36; McDonald, *Tomb of Nefertari*, 87.

⁵⁷ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, 45, pls. 42–45.

⁵⁸ Schmidt equates the vignettes (but not the text) with *Book of the Dead* 151 in, “Das Grab der Nefertari,” 247; idem, “Die Transfiguration der Nefertari,” 121, Abb. 169 and 122.

⁵⁹ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, 45–48.



Fig. 8. Top of descending corridor viewed from Chamber C (note the queen's epithets on the doorjambs)
(photograph © the J. Paul Getty Trust, [1992])

in a way that echoes the message provided (pictorially) by scenes in the corridor and (architecturally) by the corridor's steep slope. The jambs of the doorway at the top of the corridor (fig. 8) list the queen's titles and give primacy of place to those that relate to her earthly roles. In fact, the title "*rt-p't*" (conventionally translated "hereditary noblewoman") is listed first, at the top of each vertical column of text.⁶⁰ The jambs at the bottom of the corridor leading to the burial chamber (fig. 9), however, record her title "Osiris" first, and the "*rt-p't*" title does not appear at all.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, pl. 23.

⁶¹ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, pls. 8, 68.



Fig. 9. View of descending corridor and doorway to burial chamber (note the queen's epithets on the door-jambs) (photograph © the J. Paul Getty Trust, [1992])

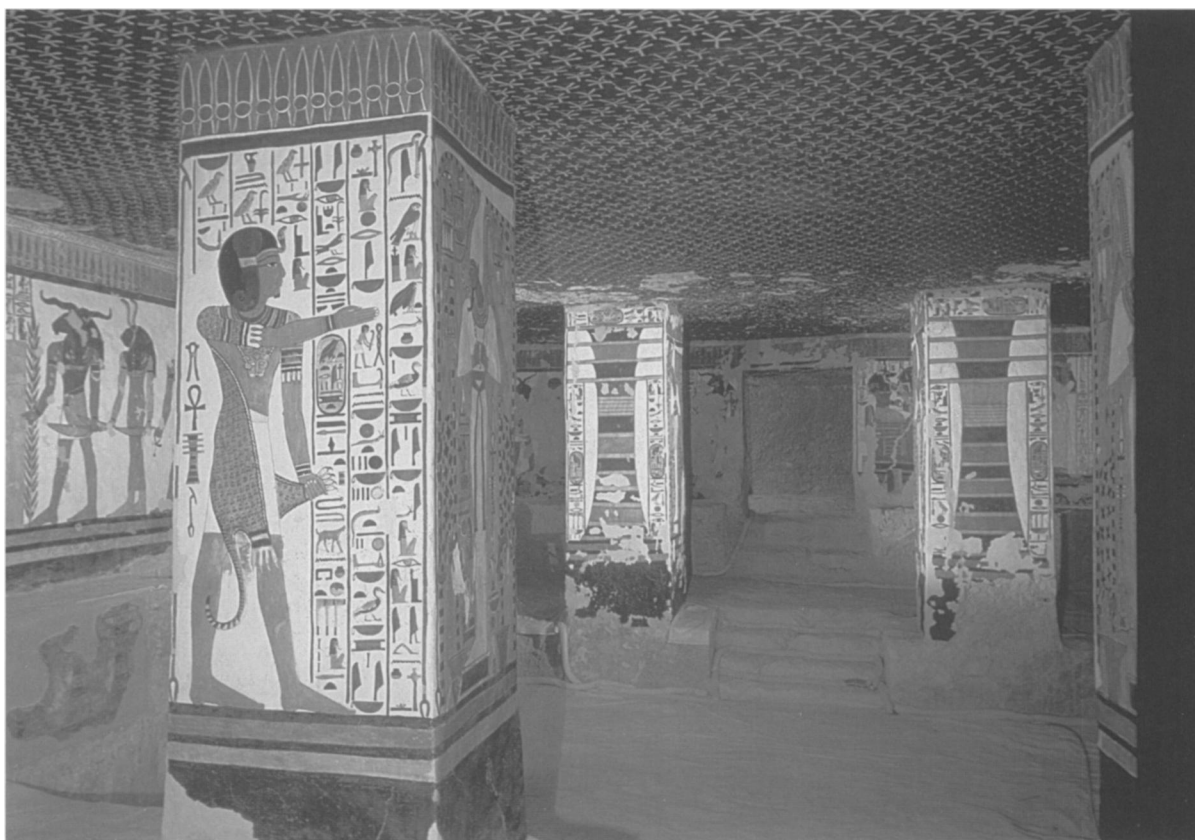


Fig. 10. View of burial chamber looking north (photograph © the J. Paul Getty Trust, [1992])

The decorative program of the burial chamber (fig. 10) defines this space as the architectural correlate of the netherworld. The west half of the chamber is decorated with images and texts that illustrate *Book of the Dead* chapter 144, in which the deceased (shown on the south wall of the burial chamber, to the west of the doorway) addresses five gates of the underworld (here condensed from the seven gates described in the chapter).⁶² A group of three supernatural beings—a doorkeeper, a guardian, and an announcer—guards each gate (the fifth gate tableau at the northwest corner is abbreviated and has only one associated figure, the doorkeeper). In addition, a canopic niche is carved into the (approximate) middle of the west wall and is decorated with figures of the winged Nut and mummiform funerary deities. All of the figures and hieroglyphs in the niche are painted to resemble gold.⁶³

⁶² Goedicke and Thausing *Nofretari*, 49–50.

⁶³ See Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, pls. 88, 89; Cathleen Keller discusses the golden figures in this niche as an example of the transfer of the so-called “monochrome” tomb style from private tombs to royal tombs in, “Royal Painters: Deir El-Medina in Dynasty XIX,” in Edward Bleiberg and Rita Freed (eds.), *Fragments of a Shattered Visage: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Ramesses the Great* (Memphis, 1991), 50–86, especially pp. 62–63; as illustrated in Leblanc, *Ta Set Nefertari*, pl. 72, a painting of Nut similar to that found in Nefertari’s canopic niche is on the sarcophagus chamber ceiling of the tomb (QV 38) of Sat-Re, the wife of Ramesses I and mother of Seti I; for examples of paintings of “golden” statues of gods in the tomb of Sety II, see Hornung, *Valley of the Kings*, 180–81, pls. 133–38; and for the definition of the “monochrome” tomb painting style see Bernard Bruyère, *Tombes thébaines de Deir el-Médineh à décoration monochrome* (Cairo, 1952), 7 ff.



Fig. 11. Mummiform Nefertari from southeast corner of Chamber M (photograph © the J. Paul Getty Trust, [1992])

The east half of the sarcophagus chamber is decorated with images and texts that illustrate Chapter 146 from the *Book of the Dead* in which the deceased recites spells for entering the House of Osiris in the Field of Reeds⁶⁴ (on the south and east walls). On the east half of the north (rear) wall, Nefertari offers to three funerary deities—Osiris, Hathor of the West, and Anubis.

The rear and lateral chambers also evoke the netherworld—with references to sacred places in real geographical locations.⁶⁵ The western lateral chamber (M) depicts a mummiform Nefertari (fig. 11), the tomb of Osiris at Abydos, and funerary deities.⁶⁶ One of the gods gives Nefertari “the kingship of Atum.”⁶⁷ The eastern lateral chamber⁶⁸ (O) is decorated with a large figure of Ma’at (on the east wall), Nefertari adoring the Hathor cow as she emerges from the west⁶⁹ (north wall), and the queen adoring Isis and Anubis (south wall).⁷⁰ A figure of Ma’at states that Nefertari has a place in the temple of Amun at Karnak.⁷¹ The decoration of the rear chamber (Q) is fragmentary and consists of a figure of Isis, a goddess protecting Nefertari’s cartouche, and a figure of Selket.⁷²

C. Leblanc identifies the burial chamber as the room in which the deceased Nefertari would lie inert like Osiris in the *Duat* before her rebirth and re-emergence.⁷³ One might take this notion a

step further and suggest that the central area of the burial chamber—the depression in which the sarcophagus was placed—can be envisioned as the

very heart of the netherworld, where Osiris (and, by association, Nefertari in her sarcophagus) is revitalized.⁷⁴ The identification of the deceased queen with Osiris is suggested by the decoration of

⁶⁴ Faulkner, *Book of the Dead*, 133–37.

⁶⁵ Schmidt envisions the lateral chambers as evocations of “mythical” locations, the west lateral chamber represents the tomb of Osiris in Abydos, in “Das Grab der Nefertari,” 254–56.

⁶⁶ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, 53–54.

⁶⁷ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, 53.

⁶⁸ Schmidt identifies this lateral chamber as the “mythic” Chemmis in, “Der Grab der Nefertari,” 256–59. The Theban references in this chamber, however, make this identification seem less definite.

⁶⁹ Hornung interprets this as an adaptation of the *Book of the Celestial Cow* for a queen’s tomb, in *Valley of the Kings*, 186.

⁷⁰ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, 54.

⁷¹ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, 54. This may refer to a statue of the queen in Karnak temple.

⁷² Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, 55; Schmidt envisions this room as a conceptual extension of the “house of gold” (i.e., the sarcophagus chamber) in, “Die Transfiguration der Nefertari,” 131–32.

⁷³ See Leblanc, “Architecture et Évolution Chronologique des Tombes de la Vallée des Reines,” 254 and 246, fig. 7; Allen, “Reading a Pyramid,” 25.

⁷⁴ Hornung, *Valley of the Kings*, 116; Allen, “Reading a Pyramid,” 24–25.

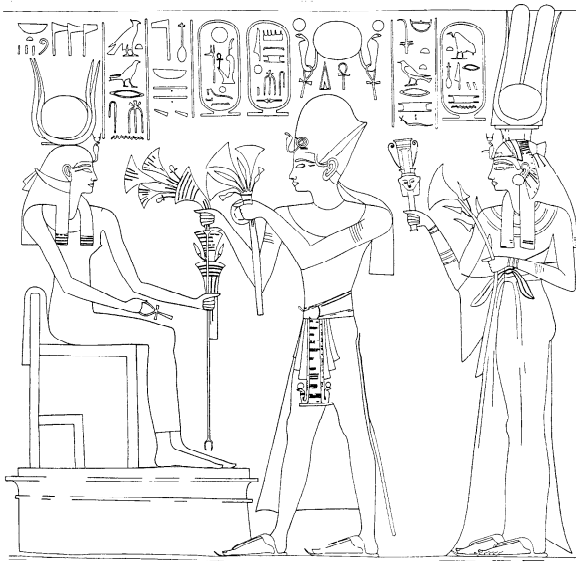


Fig. 12. Drawing of a scene from the Small Temple at Abu Simbel showing Ramesses II and Nefertari offering to Taweret (after Desroches-Noblecourt and Kuentz, *Le Petit Temple*, vol. 2., pl. 109)

the faces of the four piers surrounding the sarcophagus depression with *djed*-pillars,⁷⁵ a protective Osirian symbol. The presence of the queen's cartouches and titles along the top and sides of each *djed*-pillar suggest that these *djed*-pillars are iconic, Osirian representations of Nefertari herself.⁷⁶ The equation of Nefertari and Osiris is further strengthened by the decoration of the inner sides of the piers along the central (i.e., north-south) axis with images of Osiris-Wennefer standing and facing outward (toward the tomb entrance).

The Small Temple

The decorative program of the Small Temple of Abu Simbel exhibits significant differences from that of the tomb—differences that highlight why the decorative program of Nefertari's tomb has the form that it does. An examination of the Small Temple of Abu Simbel reveals two concepts—embedded in the rules of decorum governing the

portrayal of the royal couple—that help explain the necessity of omitting the king from the decorative program of the tomb. These rules are: (1) the ideology of kingship clearly defines an unambiguously feminine role for Nefertari when she is paired with the king; and (2) the rules of social hierarchy consistently place the queen in a subordinate position in relationship to the king.

In her book on queenship, Troy discusses and defines the role of royal women within the ideological framework of kingship. Troy argues that kingship can be envisioned as a male-female composite on earth that corresponds to the androgynous form of the creator in the divine realm.⁷⁷ Further, she demonstrates that kingship necessarily provides the conceptual frame of reference for queenship, and queenship is thus the feminine half of the androgynous totality of kingship.⁷⁸

Troy's notion can be applied to the interpretation of the Small Temple's program. Here, Nefertari is shown as an unambiguously feminine counterpart to the king—one whose place on the hierarchical scale is lower than that of the king—but who is, nevertheless, envisioned as his ideologically crucial feminine complement. The separate coronation scenes⁷⁹ for Ramesses II and Nefertari attest to the complementary relationship of the masculine and feminine elements of kingship.

⁷⁵ Hornung, *Valley of the Kings*, 187. Hornung interprets the *djed* pillar images adorning columns in the burial chamber of Ramesses II's tomb as iconic representations of the deceased assimilated with Osiris, and he believes that *djed*-pillars decorating the piers in Nefertari's burial chamber serve the queen in the same way. See also idem, "Zum Dekorationsprogramm des Nefertari-Grabes," in I. Brancoli, et al. (eds.), *L'Imperio Ramesside. Convegno Internazionale in Onore di Sergio Donadoni* (Rome, 1997), 87–93, especially p. 93.

⁷⁶ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, 54, pl. 120. Goedicke identifies a similarly labeled *djed*-pillar in the east lateral annex of the sarcophagus chamber as an image of Nefertari in the form of a *djed*-pillar. Compare pl. 120 with pls. 96, 100, 102, 106.

⁷⁷ Troy, *Patterns of Queenship*, 2ff.

⁷⁸ Troy, *Patterns of Queenship*, 2ff.

⁷⁹ Horus and Seth crown the king on the south wall of the first chamber. See Desroches-Noblecourt and Kuentz, *Le Petit Temple*, vol. 2, pls. 41–42. Isis and Hathor crown Nefertari on the south half of the east wall of the vestibule in pls. 98–99 and color plate C.

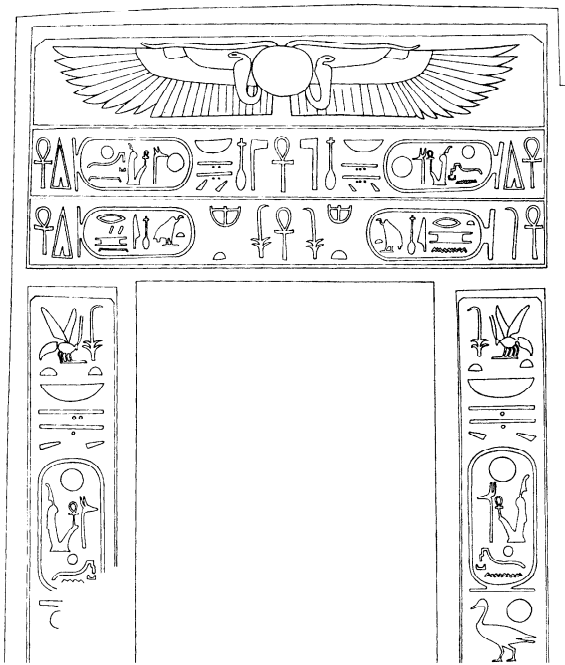


Fig. 13. Drawing of doorway lintel from the Small Temple illustrating the rule of super ordination and subordination. The horizontal register with the king's cartouche is above the register upon which the queen's cartouche is inscribed (after Desroches-Noblecourt and Kuentz, *Le Petit Temple*, vol. 2, pl. 94)

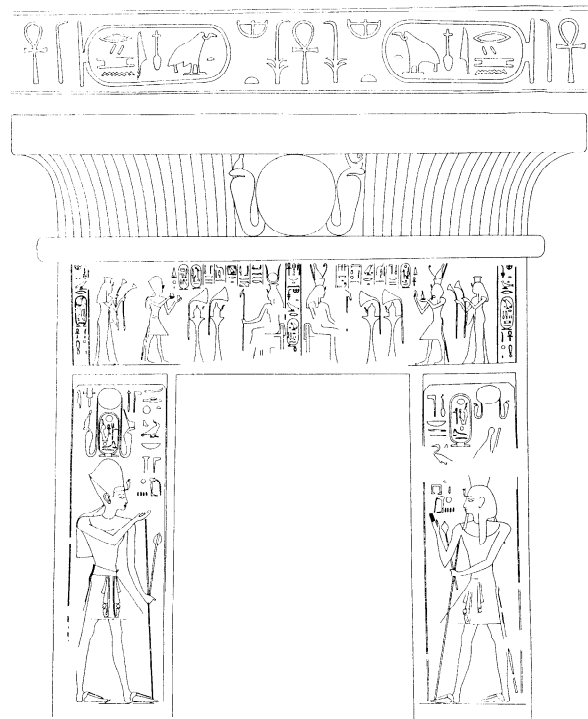


Fig. 14. Drawing of doorway lintel from the Small Temple with Nefertari's cartouche (after Desroches-Noblecourt and Kuentz, *Le Petit Temple*, vol. 2, pl. 116)

An analysis of the Small Temple's decorative program reveals that, in total, there are fifty-one pictorial scenes from the entrance corridor to the sanctuary. In all of these scenes, rigid rules of super ordination and subordination govern the relationship of the king and queen. To wit, whenever the king is shown in a scene with Nefertari, the king is always depicted in front of the queen (fig. 12). This rule also applies to the arrangement of the names and epithets of Ramesses II and Nefertari. When the king's cartouche appears along with that of Nefertari, his name appears in the dominant first (or uppermost) position.⁸⁰ An example of this comes from the lintel of one of the doorways leading from the columned hall into the vestibule (fig. 13). Here, the horizontal register inscribed with the cartouche of Ramesses II is placed above that containing the cartouche of Nefertari.⁸¹

There are, however, parts of the temple that are reserved for Nefertari alone. In these instances, the issues of super ordination and subordination do not come into play.⁸² For example, some of the temple doorway lintels omit the king's name and are inscribed with only Nefertari's cartouche (fig. 14)⁸³—just as some of the scenes depict Nefertari without her husband—but these are the only occasions in which Nefertari's name is not in a subordinate position.

⁸⁰ See Robins, "Compositional Dominance," 33, 36–37 for her discussion of the superior first position of the male in two-dimensional art—her "second rule" of compositional hierarchy.

⁸¹ Desroches-Noblecourt and Kuentz, *Le Petit Temple*, vol. 2, pls. 93–96.

⁸² Robins, "Compositional Dominance," 36–38.

⁸³ See Desroches-Noblecourt and Kuentz, *Le Petit Temple*, vol. 2, pls. 115–118.

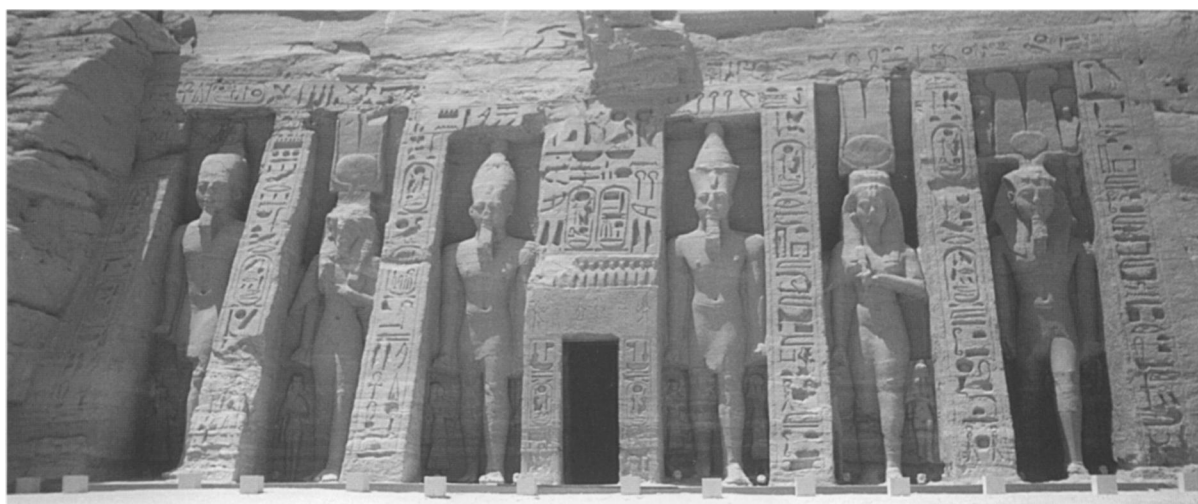


Fig. 15. Facade of the Small Temple of Nefertari and Hathor of Ibshek at Abu Simbel (photo by author)

In some cases, the pattern of compositional dominance in this temple's program dictates that the king's cartouches are not only in a superior position to those of Nefertari, but also outnumber them. This occurs on the architraves and soffits of the ceiling of the columned hall, in which the king's cartouches outnumber the queen's by a 3 to 1 ratio.⁸⁴ The arrangement of colossal statues on the façade (fig. 15) is a three-dimensional correlate of this pattern. Although the king and queen are of equal size, there are twice as many figures of the king, i.e., a 2 to 1 ratio.

Funerary Context: Rebirth and Regeneration

In sharp contrast to her role in the Small Temple, Nefertari is represented in her tomb as a being with a capacity for masculine regenerative potential. A woman's postmortem assumption of masculine sexual potential would have been deemed important for two key reasons: (1) The assimilation of the deceased with both Osiris and the solar deity was necessary for regeneration, and the ability to adopt a masculine identity may have been considered conducive to this process. (2) As Roth points out, the Egyptians appear to have believed that men, not women, were responsible for creating new life.⁸⁵ She convincingly argues that, in the Egyptian understanding of the process of conception, the role of women was to stimulate male sexual arousal and then to receive the child (already fully formed in the semen) into her body.⁸⁶

In the tomb of Nefertari, the queen's identification with Osiris, her association with the solar deity, and her gender fluidity are expressed directly and explicitly in the texts. Throughout the tomb, the inscriptions emphasize the queen's Osirian aspect by employing special epithets and phrases such as "Osiris Nefertari,"⁸⁷ or "Justified with Osiris."⁸⁸ The equation of Nefertari with Re is made through

⁸⁴ Desroches-Noblecourt and Kuentz, *Le Petit Temple*, vol. 2, pls. 59–64.

⁸⁵ Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky," 189 ff.

⁸⁶ Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky," 189.

⁸⁷ For examples of the former, see Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, pls. 53, 59.

⁸⁸ This term tends to *follow* the cartouche, in contrast to the appellation "Osiris" which directly *precedes* the queen's name or titles. The term "justified with Osiris" (*m3' hrw hr Wsir*) can occur without the "appellation" Osiris preceding Nefertari's name or titles. For examples, see Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, pls. 28, 30, 32, 34, 37, 69, 72. It can also occur in a sentence in which "Osiris" precedes the queen's name and titles (e.g., *Wsir hmt nswt wrt nbt t3wy Nfrt iry m3' hrw hr Wsir*). See pls. 35, 36, 38, 41.



Fig. 16. Nefertari and Anubis from the burial chamber of QV 66 (photograph © the J. Paul Getty Trust, [1992])

feminine, second-person singular pronouns or omit the pronoun altogether.⁹⁵ Thus, she is a male “Osiris” in death, while the titles and epithets that she held in life reflect the female aspect of her identity.

The pictorial representations of the queen further reinforce the notion of her gender fluidity. Throughout the tomb, the canonical Egyptian color encodement for male and female figures is employed. Every male deity is shown with deep orange-brown or red-brown skin (with the exception of the golden canopic niche deities and the chthonic deities Osiris and Ptah, who are depicted with green skin). Every goddess, whether fully anthropomorphic or animal-headed, is depicted with yellow skin significantly lighter than that of the male deities. Nefertari’s skin tone, however, ranges from a creamy pink-brown (with painterly flourishes such as shading on cheeks and nose) to a deep (and monochromatic) orange-brown or red-brown color, the same shades employed for male deities (fig. 16). Except for one scene, she is *never* represented with the yellow skin color used for the figures of

the speech of various gods and goddesses, who give Nefertari, “the appearance of Re.”⁸⁹ They also express the wish that she “appear in the sky like Re”⁹⁰ and enjoy “all protection, all guarding, like Re.” In the transitional corridor, Anubis states the wish that Nefertari “appear in heaven like Re,”⁹¹ and that “Iu-geret be illuminated”⁹² with her rays.

The grammatical gender of Nefertari’s titles and pronouns suggest her fluid sexual state. When, for example, she is called “true-of-voice,” this epithet is always rendered with masculine grammatical gender (*mꜣꜥ hrw*) instead of feminine grammatical gender (i.e., *mꜣꜥt hrw*). This stands in contrast to the consistent employment of the feminine grammatical gender in the titles that Nefertari assumed in life such as “*hmt nswt wrt*,” “*rt pꜣt*,” and “*nbt tꜣwy*.”⁹³ Furthermore, *Book of the Dead* chapter 17, which deals unequivocally with the notion that Nefertari is deceased and undergoing transformation, refers to the queen with masculine pronouns.⁹⁴ In other inscriptions, when gods and goddesses address Nefertari directly, they use

⁸⁹ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, 52.

⁹⁰ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, 41–42, 44, 46–48.

⁹¹ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, 47.

⁹² Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, 47.

⁹³ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, pls. 19–23, 27–28, 30, 32, 34, 35–39, 41, 46, 48, 50, 52–69, 72–76, 78, 80, 85, 94–96, 98, 100–104, 106, 108–9, 112–16, 119–21, 123.

⁹⁴ Goedicke notes that the assimilation with Osiris is responsible for the male grammatical gender. See Goedicke, *Nofretari*, 39, n. 50. A less plausible explanation is offered by McDonald, who views the use of masculine pronouns referring to the queen as the result of a circumstance in which “the copyist lost his concentration from time to time. . . .”; see McDonald, *House of Eternity*, 59, n. 2.

⁹⁵ See example of the use of feminine second-person singular pronoun (gods and goddesses speaking to Nefertari and bestowing blessings upon her) see Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, pls. 53, 57, 59. For examples of the consistent omission of pronouns, see pls. 31, 39.

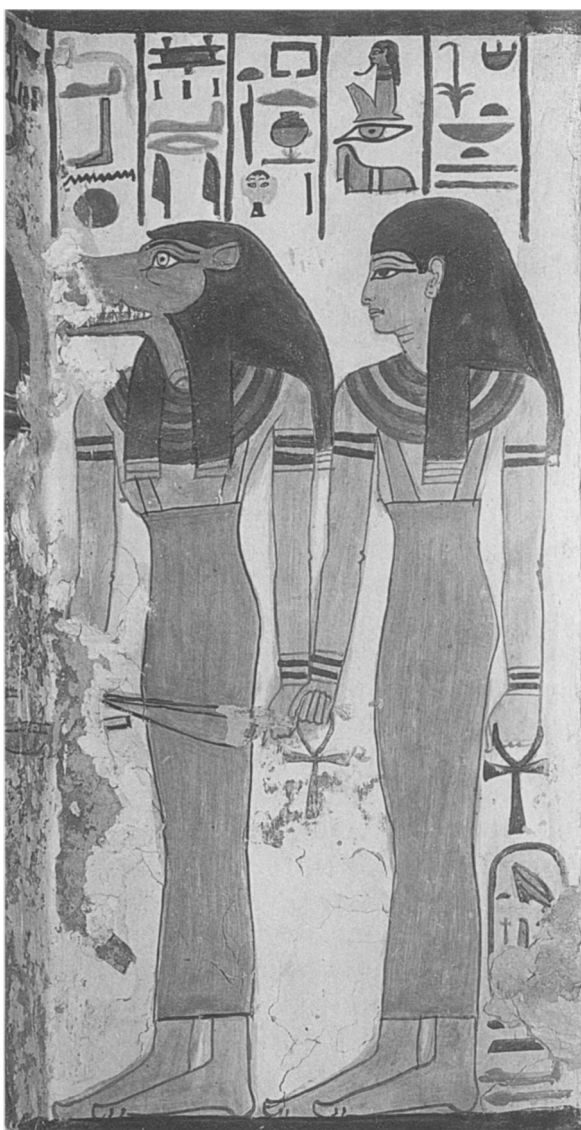


Fig. 17. The “announcer” Nefertari from the west wall of the burial chamber (photograph by Harry Burton © The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

the intentionality of the “masculine” color encodement in the many orange-brown and red-brown representations of Nefertari.⁹⁸ The yellow-skinned Nefertari also provides a clear contrast with the more ambiguous representations with pink-brown skin (which might be envisioned as a “gender-fluid” color

goddesses. In all other tomb scenes, Nefertari’s skin color is usually significantly darker—and *always* different—from that of the female deities.

The one exception to this rule (fig. 17) occurs near the south corner of the west wall of the burial chamber, where the queen is shown in the role of the “announcer”⁹⁶ of the first gate in chapter 144 of the *Book of the Dead*. In this vignette, she is shown with yellow skin. This particular representation of Nefertari is made visually distinct from all of her other depictions by costume as well as skin color. Nefertari as the “announcer” wears a tight sheath dress—the “archaic” female costume worn by every goddess—instead of the loose-fitting white gown worn by women of the period, which she wears elsewhere in the tomb.

This aspect of the queen, along with the door-keeper and guardian, confronts a typical darker-skinned representation of herself on the south wall of the burial chamber. The “announcer” Nefertari serves as a graphic guarantee of the efficacy of the process of the queen’s rebirth and regeneration, because she has successfully completed her transformation (the period of gender fluidity being a temporary phase in the cyclical regenerative process)—and having done so has regained her unambiguously feminine aspect. In other words, the divine, yellow-skinned Nefertari is the ideal form that the queen will become at the conclusion of the process.⁹⁷

The evidence that artisans were not completely restricted from using yellow to represent Nefertari in the tomb suggests that there was a special reason to refrain from employing yellow in all of the other representations. Thus, the anomalous yellow-skinned representation of the queen appears to be an exception that clearly underscores

⁹⁶ Goedicke and Thausing, *Nofretari*, 49. Goedicke does not recognize the “announcer” as Nefertari. He describes the “announcer” figure of the first gate as a “woman without any special features.” For the opinion that this image represents Nefertari—and is the tomb’s only yellow-skinned representation of the queen, see Hornung, *Valley of the Kings*, 195, pl. 151.

⁹⁷ A comparable use of visual art to ensure a desired result is discussed by Gay Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge, 1997), 190. Robins suggests that a group of Deir el-Medina ostraca, decorated with images of women nursing their babies, show the dangerous process of childbirth as a successful *fait accompli* and were thus used to produce the desired outcome.

⁹⁸ Although the tomb clearly employs traditional, canonical, gendered color encodement, at Abu Simbel the Small Temple’s program represents all of the figures—gods and goddesses and the king and queen—with bright golden skin regardless of gen-



Fig. 18. Illustration from the Book of the Dead chapter 164 (BM 10253) showing the ithyphallic form of the goddess Mut-Pakhet (photograph © the British Museum)

because they employ neither the “masculine” color encodement nor the specifically “feminine” yellow, either). Until the Twentieth Dynasty, when Tyti (QV 52) and Isis (QV 51) were depicted throughout their tombs with pink-brown skin (without shading), Nefertari was the only queen known to be represented with this ambiguous skin color. All other surviving paintings from Nineteenth Dynasty queens’ tombs show the royal women with the orange-brown or red-brown “masculine” skin color that contrasts with images of yellow-skinned goddesses in those same tombs.⁹⁹

The variation in Nefertari’s skin-color further supports the notion that, while death transforms the queen into the male Osiris and solar god, she also preserves the feminine identity that defined her living aspect—a state that perhaps finds a conceptual correlate in the ithyphallic form of the

goddess Mut-Pakhet (fig. 18) that illustrates *Book of the Dead* chapter 164.¹⁰⁰ Another, very graphic, demonstration of female gender fluidity in funerary art comes from the tomb (QV 52) of Tyti, a Twentieth Dynasty royal woman, who is shown in one scene wearing the typical dress and regalia of a Ramesside queen, but is shown as the male Tyti/Iunmutef¹⁰¹ (fig. 19) in an adjacent scene.

Roth suggests that the images of a female tomb owner retain an aspect of visible feminine identity in order to stimulate her male fertility and help her self-regeneration.¹⁰² It is possible then, to apply this idea to Nefertari’s tomb, and to envision her own feminine form stimulating her male aspect and re-conceiving herself. I would, however, like to suggest another possibility—namely that she (in her deceased, male, Osirian/solar aspect) can be envisioned as being stimulated and regenerated through interaction with the goddesses represented on the walls of her tomb (of whom Isis and Hathor, the consorts of Osiris and Re, respectively, are those most frequently depicted).

Conclusion

Ramesses II’s conspicuous absence from the tomb of Nefertari appears to be an intentional and important part of the process of Nefertari’s regeneration. This absence can be understood when one

der. The golden color is comparable to that used for the figures and hieroglyphs in the canopic niche of QV 66. As in the canopic niche, the intent seems to be to represent figures that have golden flesh.

⁹⁹ A scene from the tomb of Merytamun (QV 68), a daughter of Nefertari and Ramesses II, employs the same color encodement scheme. A scene on the north half of the west wall of Merytamun’s antechamber shows the queen standing between Isis and Horus, Son-of-Isis. While Isis is depicted with light yellow skin, both Merytamun and Horus have dark orange-brown skin. See Leblanc, *Ta Set Neferou*, pl. 175. Other examples are from the sarcophagus chamber of the tomb (QV 73) of Henuttawy, pl. 188, and the Antechamber of the tomb (QV 40) of an anonymous queen, pls. 74, 75 (A); see Christian Leblanc and Alberto Siliotti, *Nefertari e la Valle delle Regina* (Florence, 1993), 65–67 for vivid color photos of the decorative program of the anonymous queen in QV 40, which shows that the queen appears to have dark-orange brown skin throughout the tomb, while goddesses are clearly shown with light yellow skin.

¹⁰⁰ Faulkner, *Book of the Dead*, 160, 163. This chapter prescribes the use of an ithyphallic, three-headed figure of Mut-Pakhet while reciting wishes for the well being of the deceased in the afterlife. The chapter, however, is dedicated to ritual performance and does not explain the significance of the goddess’s phallic form.

¹⁰¹ Leblanc, *Ta Set Neferou*, pl. 122; PM I, part 2, 758 (20)–(21).

¹⁰² Roth, “Father Earth, Mother Sky,” 199.



Fig. 19. Queen Tyti (QV 52) as a woman (left) and as the male Tyti/Iunmutf (right) (photo by author)

considers three key issues: the king's relationship to both Osiris and Re; hierarchical decorum and the ideology of queenship; and the necessity of the queen's assumption of masculine regenerative capacity (and her identification with Osiris and Re) in order to be reborn after death.

Osiris, in his role as the deceased king of the netherworld, provides a model for the static and unchanging aspect of every Egyptian king in death—just as the solar deity serves as a parallel paradigmatic model for the cyclical renewal of the living and the deceased king. Both paradigms are “built in” to the ideology of masculine kingship. For this reason, the association of Ramesses II with Osiris and the solar deity is more appropriate than that of a royal woman with Osiris. Tomb inscriptions that frame Nefertari's power in terms of kingship (i.e., allowing Nefertari to sit on the throne of Osiris and endowing her with the rulership of Atum) bear this notion out by suggesting that Nefertari's role in the funerary context must be equated with that of masculine rulership in order to facilitate her afterlife existence.¹⁰³

Nefertari is equated frequently and directly with both Re and Osiris in QV 66's texts; and her sexual fluidity is strongly suggested by the employment of masculine grammatical gender in the inscriptions and by canonical masculine color encodement in the pictorial images. If, however, the

king were depicted in the tomb, he, as the male ruler (and as a higher-ranking royal than the queen), would be a more appropriate “Osiris” and “Re” for three important reasons:

- 1) The king, as the masculine aspect of kingship, has a considerably closer ideological relationship with both Osiris and Re than does the queen, who, as the feminine half of kingship, is associated with the goddess Hathor.¹⁰⁴
- 2) The king's relationship to the queen within the context of kingship “fixes” Nefertari's unambiguously female role, and if she is conceptually “locked in” to a feminine role, she cannot attain the fluidity of gender identity that would assist her association with Osiris and Re or her assumption of the masculine regenerative potential that would allow her to experience rebirth and renewal.

¹⁰³ Hornung suggests that Nefertari's tomb directly borrows imagery from king's tombs, and these features set it apart from the tombs of officials and princes in *Valley of the Kings*, 186–87 and idem, “Zum Dekorationsprogramm des Nefertari-Grabes,” 88–93.

¹⁰⁴ For the association of royal women with Hathor, and Hathor's role as the divine manifestation of the feminine prototype that royal women embody see Troy, *Patterns of Queenship*, 3, 53–72.

- 3) In a related way, the fact that the king was of a higher status also has an impact upon Nefertari's ability to regenerate. The king's presence would force her, as a royal woman, into the specific subordinate position that reinforces her ideological role as the king's complementary (and female) opposite—a role that impedes her ability to assume both “kingly” status and gender fluidity. As the decorative program of the Small Temple illustrates, Nefertari is shown in a position of compositional (and conceptual) super ordination only when the name or image of Ramesses II is omitted.

As mentioned previously, New Kingdom pharaohs are depicted in the tombs of their (lower status) sons, while Ramesses was omitted from Nefertari's tomb—just as all royal males were omitted from every archaeologically-known tomb of a Ramesside queen. This can be explained by the ideological construct of kingship itself. To wit, royal women (including mother, consort, and daughter) can be envisioned as the multigenerational feminine half of kingship, while the royal sons can be envisioned as part of the masculine half of kingship. Thus, the king's presence in his son's tomb does not compromise the son's masculine regenerative capacity or his ability to become an Osiris, because the prince can be envisioned as one facet of the multigenerational masculine model of kingship¹⁰⁵ (as exemplified by the mythic paradigm of Osiris and Horus or Amun and Khonsu). The queen, in contrast, is drawn in complementary opposition to the king.

Thus the mechanism of regeneration that allows Nefertari to exist after death is contingent upon the queen's gender fluidity, her ability to assume both masculine regenerative capacity and Osirian/solar identification, and a conceptual (perhaps “kingly”) primacy of place—all of which would be impossible if the king were present. Furthermore, the expression of these ideas in the pictorial art of the tomb is directly related to the tomb's function as a vehicle for the queen's regeneration. Just as the conceptual balance of representations of the king and queen in the Small Temple's program are appropriate (and perhaps necessary) for the cultic function of the temple, so the manner in which the queen is represented in her tomb—without her husband and with a fluid sexual identity—is, at its core, an assurance of the proper function of the tomb and the guarantee of Nefertari's afterlife existence.

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of the “father-son” opposition as an application of the dualistic masculine generational structure see Troy, *Patterns of Queenship*, 27–28. Troy cites the juxtaposition of Atum and Re-Horakhty as gods with well defined spheres of reference in which Atum is associated with creation and Re-Horakhty is associated with rebirth.



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Forever Young? The Representation of Older and Ageing Women in Ancient Egyptian Art

DEBORAH SWEENEY

In Egyptian art, women are generally represented as young and beautiful; representations of older women are rare. By contrast, male ageing is represented far more frequently and in greater detail than that of women, since it was a positive image for men.

Nonetheless, examples with some features of ageing, such as a wrinkle on the face, are known from all periods, and associated with both elite and non-elite women. These representations of older women could be an attempt to express the authority and experience conveyed by the image of male ageing.

Features of ageing are absent from the images of elite women between the early Eighteenth Dynasty and the Amarna period. Although women did not, by and large, adopt the image of older women to the same degree as Tiy and Nefertiti, after the Amarna period elite women are once more represented with some characteristics of ageing in formal Egyptian art.

Egyptian art seldom depicted older women or women growing older: “neither pregnancy nor the spreading waistline that many women must have had after years of bearing children is part of the image.”¹ Women were normally depicted as young, slender and beautiful.² This was partly due to the performative function of Egyptian art, aimed at establishing whatever was depicted in an alternative reality, such as the world of the gods or the afterworld. In principle, people were depicted at the peak of their energy and beauty in order to remain so forever.³ Elite women portrayed in tomb chapels were supposed to be sexually attractive⁴ to assist in their husband’s regeneration and rebirth in the afterworld;⁵ non-elite women were conventionally portrayed as healthy energetic servants of the tomb-owner and his family in the next life. Egyptian men might be depicted at different stages of life, both in the prime of life and also in successful, portly middle age,⁶ but women who are anything

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¹ Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1993), 180.

² E.g., John R. Baines, *Fecundity Figures: Egyptian Personification and the Iconology of a Genre* (Warminster, 1985), 125.

³ Actually, people rich enough to own tombs where they were represented as young were probably already mature (Gay Robins, personal communication).

⁴ Ann Macy Roth, “Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs about Conception and Fertility,” in Alison E. Rautman, ed., *Reading the Body. Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record* (Philadelphia, 2000), 194–96 argues that in ancient Egypt fertility was a male attribute: Egyptian women were supposed to be sexually alluring in order to stimulate men’s fertility.

⁵ Roth, “Father Earth, Mother Sky,” 198.

⁶ E.g., Elisabeth Stahelin, *Untersuchungen zur ägyptischen Tracht im Alten Reich (MÄS 8)* (Berlin, 1966), 183–89, or Baines, *Fecundity Figures*, 126. By contrast, Henry G. Fischer, “Varia Aegyptiaca,” *JARCE* 2 (1963), 19, 23 argues that this image represents old age “an ideal of sedentary and well-fed ease that was appropriate to the tomb owner’s later years.”

other than young are unusual in Egyptian art. As Heike Behlmer puts it, "Ägyptische Elitemänner altern gut, Männer der Unterschicht und Ausländer altern schlecht. Ägyptische Frauen altern gar nicht."⁷

This stereotypical representation of women as young and beautiful was so well-established that even individuals known to be no longer young were portrayed in the bloom of youth. For instance, Mer-si-ankh III is represented as young in the reliefs of her tomb at Giza⁸ although her skeleton seems to be that of a woman in her fifties.⁹ In the tomb of Userhat at Thebes (TT 51), his wife and his mother-in-law are depicted as more or less the same age.¹⁰ Often only an accompanying inscription makes clear whether a figure is that of a man's wife or his mother.¹¹

In this essay, I will attempt to trace the portrayal of older women and women growing older in Egypt, from the Third Dynasty down to the end of the New Kingdom. Before the Third Dynasty, many aspects of the canons of Egyptian representation were not yet standardized. In the Third Intermediate Period, by contrast, a more rounded body type appeared:¹² larger, more drooping breasts and thickened body became standard representations of the female figure and no longer necessarily denoted a woman growing older.

1. Methodological Considerations

As women age, their bodies change in various ways. Breasts begin to sag and stomachs to grow rounder, lines and wrinkles appear on the face, backs begin to stoop, and in later old age women may become very gaunt.

However, Egyptian art did not necessarily combine these features consistently, or in a fixed order, when portraying women as they grew older. This may reflect the reality of the ageing process: people do not always age in the same way.¹³ Facial lines and body changes appear in different sequences for different people at different ages. On the other hand, the choice to represent people in a certain way may have been ideological, aimed at communicating the message that a person was growing older without including every detail of the ageing process. For instance, the face of a statue or a two-dimensional representation may show signs of ageing whereas the body does not. One of the most dramatic examples of "an old head on a young body" is the statue of Queen Tuya in the Vatican, whose face is deeply lined but whose body is firm and youthful. Barbara Lesko argues that this is an attempt to foreground the sexuality of the queen mother, the major mother figure upon earth, and that this body is ideological rather than a representation of the queen's actual body.¹⁴ However, Arielle Kozloff has recently shown that the statue originally belonged to Queen Tiy of the Eighteenth Dynasty, and the deep cheek ridges are in fact the result of cutting down the original face of the statue.¹⁵ Nonetheless, as Lesko remarks, it is nonetheless significant that the end product, combining

⁷ Heike Behlmer, "Alte werden unter Pharaonen," *Mitteilungen der Grazer Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 11 (2002/2003), 48. Cf. Gay Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1997), 76.

⁸ Dows Dunham and William Kelly Simpson, *The Mastaba of Queen Mersyankh III (G 7530-7540)* (Boston, 1974). However, the statuette head MFA 30.1461 (pl. 19) shows a woman with lined face.

⁹ Dunham and Simpson, *Mersyankh*, 21.

¹⁰ Norman de Garis Davies, *Two Ramesside Tombs at Thebes* (New York, 1927), 10, 16, pls. 8, 9.

¹¹ Gay Robins, "While the Woman Looks On: Gender inequality in the New Kingdom," *KMT* 1/3 (1990), 21.

¹² Karl-Heinz Priese, *Das Ägyptische Museum Berlin* (Mainz, 1991), 231; Sylvia Schoske, Barbara Krießl, and Renate Germer, *Anch: Blumen für das Leben: Pflanzen im alten Ägypten* (Munich, 1992), 211. Edna R. Russmann, *Eternal Egypt. Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum* (London, 2001), 221-22, 248.

¹³ Douglas E. Crews, "Biological Anthropology and Human Aging: Some Current Directions in Aging Research," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22 (1993), 395-423.

¹⁴ Barbara Lesko, "Queen Khamerernebt II and Her Sculpture," in Leonard H. Lesko, ed., *Ancient Egyptian and Mediterranean Studies in Memory of William A. Ward* (Providence, Rhode Island, 1998), 158.

what appears to be a deeply lined face with a slender body, was thought appropriate to represent the queen mother.

Many depictions of older women and women growing older are not necessarily portraits of that individual. Rather, they represent types such as 'an old woman' or 'a mature woman' or hint that a person is mature. Even in cases when statues or reliefs of an individual display distinctive features, this may be for ideological reasons rather than representing how that person actually looked.¹⁶

In certain contexts, some of the signs which were commonly used to denote ageing may have a different significance. Edna Russmann has demonstrated the existence of a "second style" during the Sixth Dynasty. One characteristic feature of this "second style" is ridges running from nose to mouth, which in this case do not necessarily denote age.¹⁷

Similarly, in the Amarna period, certain signs usually associated with ageing in Egyptian art appear with the royal daughters, even in childhood, such as lines at the corner of the mouth,¹⁸ probably derived from the iconography of the royal couple. The princesses are also occasionally shown with double chins,¹⁹ which may indicate childhood plumpness since it is not part of their parents' characteristic image.

Looking at portrayals of ageing may show us how the Ancient Egyptians constructed different stages of the gendered life cycle. But looking at gender in isolation is not enough.²⁰ We should investigate how gender and the ageing process intersect with class and race, and what type of representation the Egyptians considered appropriate for which social group.

Normally it was unusual for elite women to show signs of ageing on their bodies, particularly when they were portrayed together with their spouses. By contrast, servants and other non-elite women were portrayed more often with lined faces and drooping breasts.²¹ This distinction was primarily ideologically motivated, highlighting the contrast between the young, healthy elite and anyone outside the elite, yet nonetheless it might have had a certain basis in reality. Although most women probably became pregnant frequently, irrespective of their status, elite women were seldom obliged to perform manual labor, and they probably enjoyed a more nourishing diet and could afford better medical care than poorer women, who would have aged more rapidly.

As a starting point to identify characteristics of women's ageing in Egyptian art, I selected the most elderly of all representations of women, an Old Kingdom figurine of a miller from the Louvre (fig. 1).²² From this figurine, a number of characteristics of ageing may be identified, although most of them are not present simultaneously on most of the representations under discussion, and few display them to such a great degree. These characteristics are:

- a. Drooping breasts
- b. Gauntness
- c. Nasolabial folds
- d. Line at the corner of the mouth
- e. Bags under the eyes

¹⁵ Arielle P. Kozloff, "A Masterpiece with Three Lives—The Vatican's Statue of Tuya," in Peter der Manuelian, ed., *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson* (Boston, 1996), 483.

¹⁶ Edna R. Russmann, *Egyptian Sculpture: Cairo and Luxor* (Austin, Texas, 1989), 115.

¹⁷ Edna R. Russmann, "A Second Style in Egyptian Art of the Old Kingdom," *MDAIK* 51 (1995), 268–79, especially 270.

¹⁸ Dorothea Arnold, *The Royal Women of Amarna. Images of Beauty from Ancient Egypt* (New York, 1996), fig. 108.

¹⁹ Arnold, *Royal Women of Amarna*, figs 49, 108.

²⁰ Lynn Meskell, *Archaeologies of Social Life: Age, Sex, Class et cetera in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 1999), passim: see p. 2 for a formulation.

²¹ Cf. Baines, *Fecundity Figures*, 125.

²² Louvre E 7704 bis.

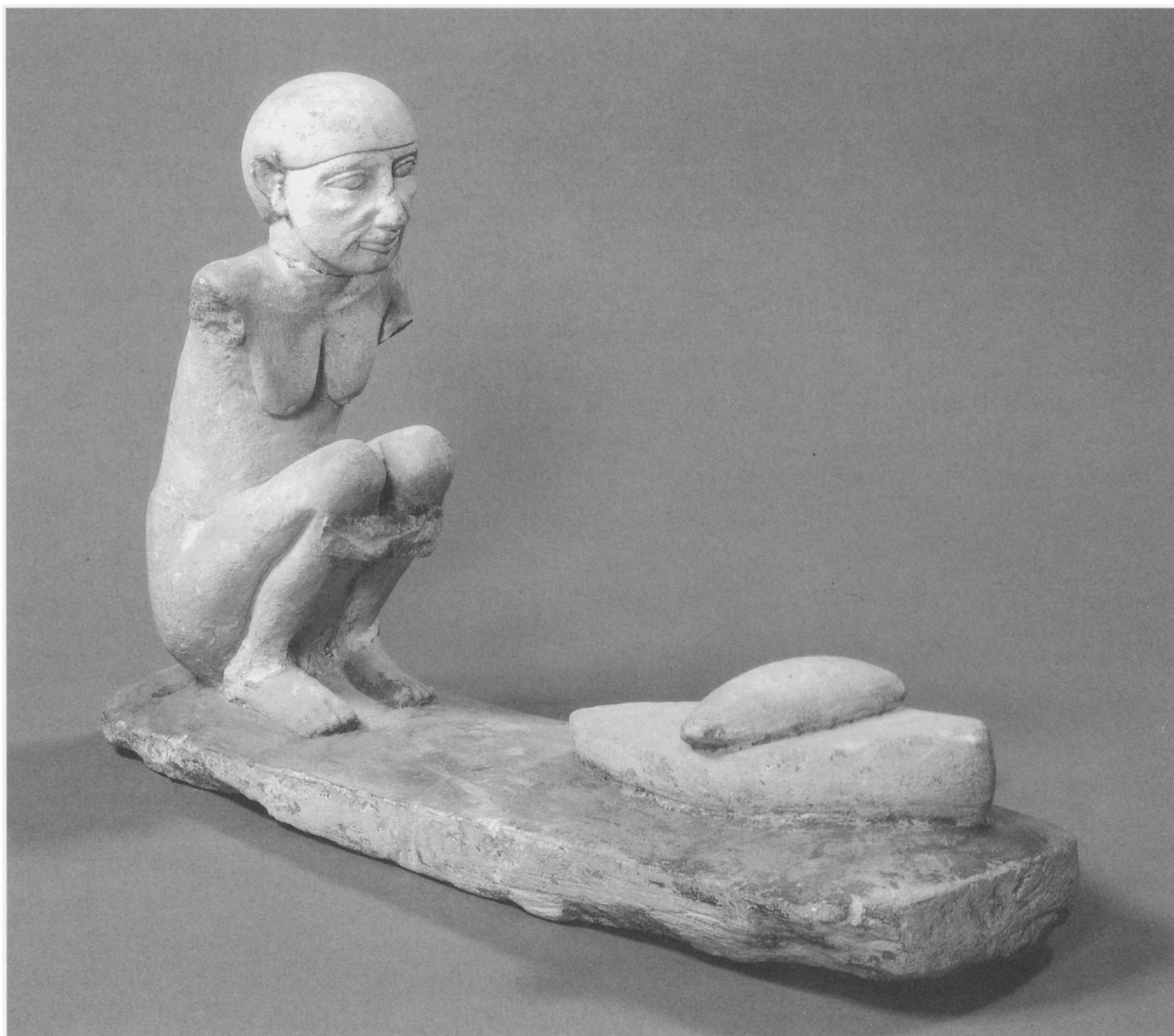


Fig. 1. Figurine of a miller from the Old Kingdom. Cliché RMN, modèle de meunière agée: Les Frères Chuzeville.

2. Signs of Ageing on the Body

a. Drooping breasts

The flattened, elongated breasts of much older women are easy to identify, for example, the two millers (fig. 2)²³ on the false door of Itefnen and Peritem in the Cairo Museum or a woman from the tomb of Kahif represented threshing grain (fig. 3).²⁴

²³ After Nadine Cherpion, "La fausse-porte d'Itfenn et Peritem au Musée du Caire," *BIFAO* 82 (1982), pls. 16, 17. Cf. Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts Expedition 21.2600—Yvonne J. Markowitz, Joyce L. Haynes and Rita E. Freed, *Egypt in the Age of the Pyramids* (Boston, 2002), 90–91; BM 1372—Dietrich Wildung, *Sesostris und Amenemhet. Ägypten im Mittleren Reich* (Munich, 1984), 27.

²⁴ After Hermann Junker, *Bericht über die von der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien auf gemeinsame Kosten mit Dr. Wilhelm Pelizaeus unternommenen Grabungen auf dem Friedhof des Alten Reiches bei den Pyramiden von Giza*, vol. 6 (Wien and Leipzig, 1943), 148–49, pl. 14. The female victims of famine on the causeway of Unas are also portrayed with flattened drooping breasts, probably the result of malnutrition. See John F. Nunn, *Ancient Egyptian Medicine* (London, 1996), 20.

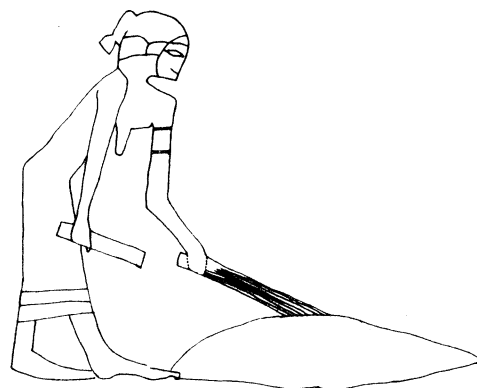
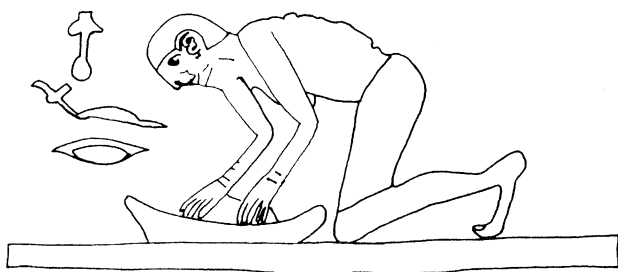


Fig. 3. Elder woman from the tomb of Kahif threshing grain.



Fig. 2. The millers Samut and Nefer. Drawing by the author.

14.²⁵ As a rule of thumb, in seated or standing representations, the face from the hairline downwards and neck will take up two squares in this grid and the upper chest another two; the distance between hairline and shoulder should be the same as that between shoulder and nipple. If the nipple falls below this point, then the breast is beginning to droop. When women bend over, however, their breasts automatically droop more.²⁶ Although this is certainly true of representations of female brewers and millers from the Old Kingdom, nonetheless, some of them seem to have full or drooping breasts in any case.²⁷

Women from the elite are rarely depicted with ageing bodies. However, there are a couple of interesting cases from the Old Kingdom where elite women are shown on their own personal monuments with drooping breasts. Hathorneferhotep, the wife of Khabausoker, had a tomb of her own, as was customary during the Third Dynasty, and is shown with drooping breasts, and other signs of ageing²⁸ (fig. 4).²⁹ On a false door from the First Intermediate Period now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, a woman named Hemy-Re is portrayed as a girl, as a woman in her prime and as an older woman with drooping bosom (fig. 5).³⁰ This may be an analogy to the contemporary

²⁵ Gay Robins, *Proportion and Style in Ancient Egyptian Art* (Austin, Texas 1994), 46–47, 75, 79.

²⁶ *Fecundity Figures*, 125.

²⁷ E.g., Ahmed Mahmoud Moussa and Hartwig Altenmüller, *Das Grab des Nianchnum und Chnumhotep* (Mainz, 1977), pl. 23; Ludwig Borchardt, *Statuen und Statuetten von Königen und Privatleuten im Museum von Kairo, Catalogue Général des antiquités égyptiennes du musée du Caire, Nos. 1–1294* (Berlin, 1911), no. 110.

²⁸ CGC 1386, 1387. Nadine Cherpion, “The Human Image in Old Kingdom Nonroyal Reliefs,” in Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids* (New York, 1999), 104–5.

²⁹ After Nadine Cherpion, “Le mastaba de Khabausokar (MM A₂): Problèmes de chronologie,” *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 11 (1980), pl. 2 following p. 80.

³⁰ Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge E.6.1909. Eleni Vassilika, *Egyptian Art* (Cambridge, 1995), 22–23; Henry George Fischer, “Some Early Monuments from Busiris in the Egyptian Delta,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 11 (1976), 14–22.

practice of depicting men in their tombs as both in the prime of life and in successful portly middle age.³¹ These older women may thus have appropriated aspects of the Egyptian images of successful male ageing to express female power and experience, an aspect of their lives which might become more prominent in circumstances when women were not required to appear in the role of attractive partner to their husband.³²

From the Middle Kingdom until the reign of Amenhotep III, sagging breasts do not form part of the iconography of elite women. They are restricted to depictions of working women,³³ mourners,³⁴ and foreigners,³⁵ such as a weaver from the tomb of Khnumhotep in Beni Hasan (fig. 6).³⁶

However, during the reigns of Amenhotep III and Akhenaten, the most influential women in Egypt, Queen Ti (fig. 7)³⁷ and Nefertiti (fig. 8),³⁸ were represented with signs of ageing. Dorothea Arnold argues that this is a deliberate attempt to provide a female parallel to the image of the venerable and experienced older male.³⁹ She suggests that the later representations of Ti and Nefertiti as older women developed from the adoption at the start of Akhenaten's reign of an artistic idiom of hollow cheeks, hooded eyes, strongly marked cheekbones, and lines and folds at the corners of mouth and nose, commonly used to depict outsiders and older people, for the royal couple.⁴⁰ Without these intermediate stages, she thinks, it would not have been possible to depict the queens with signs of ageing. However, it is important to note that Nefertiti allowed ageing to be inscribed not only on her face but also on her body, a most unusual combination for elite women.

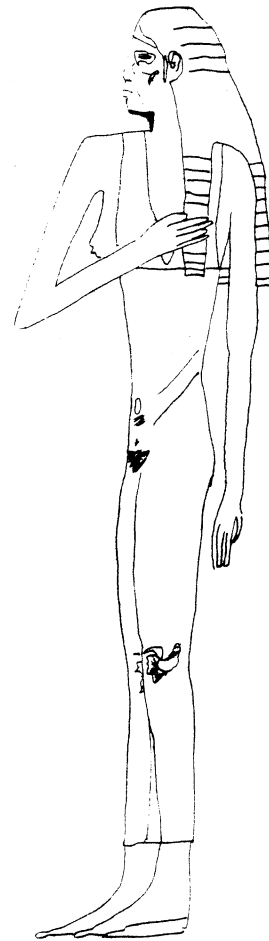


Fig. 4. Relief of Hathorneferhotep. Drawing by the author.

³¹ Fischer, "Some Early Monuments from Busiris," 14.

³² However, another contemporary example from the First Intermediate Period depicts a woman with drooping breasts in the company of her husband. Boston 12.1475—Ronald J. Leporon, *Stelae I. The early dynastic period to the late Middle Kingdom*, Corpus Antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum Boston, fasc. 2 (Boston, 1985), 2.63–65.

³³ Turin Inv Supp. 1342—Anna Maria Donadoni Roveri, ed., *Egyptian Civilization: Daily Life* (Turin, 1987), 129; TT 57 Walter Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altägyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, I (Leipzig, 1923), 192; weaving workshop in the tomb of Djehutnefer—Abdel Ghaffar Shedid, *Stil der Grabmalereien in der Zeit Amenophis' II*, *Archäologische Veröffentlichungen* 66 (Mainz, 1988), pls. 5a, 27, 36. The sex of this person is uncertain. Some think that an older woman is represented here, some an older man (Sadid, *Stil der Grabmalereien*, 128). It is possible for older men to have a sagging bosom: breast development in men is a side effect of schistosomiasis (see Nunn, *Ancient Egyptian Medicine*, 69). The figure's hairstyle and clothing are more typical of men at this period, although women were also occasionally portrayed working stripped to the waist in the New Kingdom, as in the tomb of Nakht (Barry Kemp and Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, *The Ancient Textile Industry at Amarna*, [London, 2001], 193).

³⁴ William Christopher Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt*, vol. 2 (New York, 1959), 31.

³⁵ E.g., TT 78 Haremheb—Anneliese and Artur Brack, *Das Grab des Haremheb*. *Theben Nr. 78* (Mainz, 1980), 50; TT 81 Ineni—Wreszinski, *Atlas*, vol 1, 261 B.

³⁶ After Ann K. Capel and Glenn Markoe, *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven: Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cincinnati, 1996), 20.

³⁷ Ägyptisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Inv. 21834.

³⁸ Ägyptisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Inv. 21263.

³⁹ Arnold, *Royal Women of Amarna*, 30.

⁴⁰ Arnold, *Royal Women of Amarna*, 19–20.



Fig. 5. False door of Hemy-Re. Reproduction by permission of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

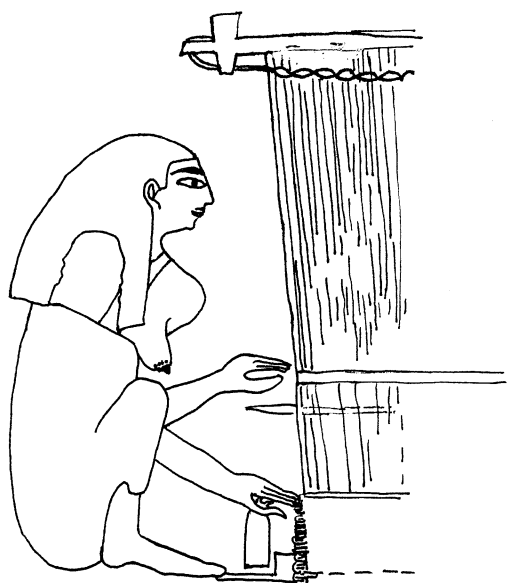


Fig. 6. Weaver from the tomb of Khumhotep in Beni Hasan. Drawing by the author.

During the reign of Akhenaten, elite women are not depicted with signs of ageing on their bodies, although one of a group of musicians has drooping breasts.⁴¹ After the Amarna period, however, elite women are occasionally shown with somewhat fuller breasts.⁴²

From the end of the reign of Amenhotep III onwards, mourners with drooping breasts⁴³ become more common. Maybe artists varied the shape of the women's breasts to make a group of mourners visually more interesting. However, it is significant that drooping breasts are not avoided in this context, and even the tomb-owner's own relations were occasionally depicted mourning with drooping breasts (fig. 9).⁴⁴

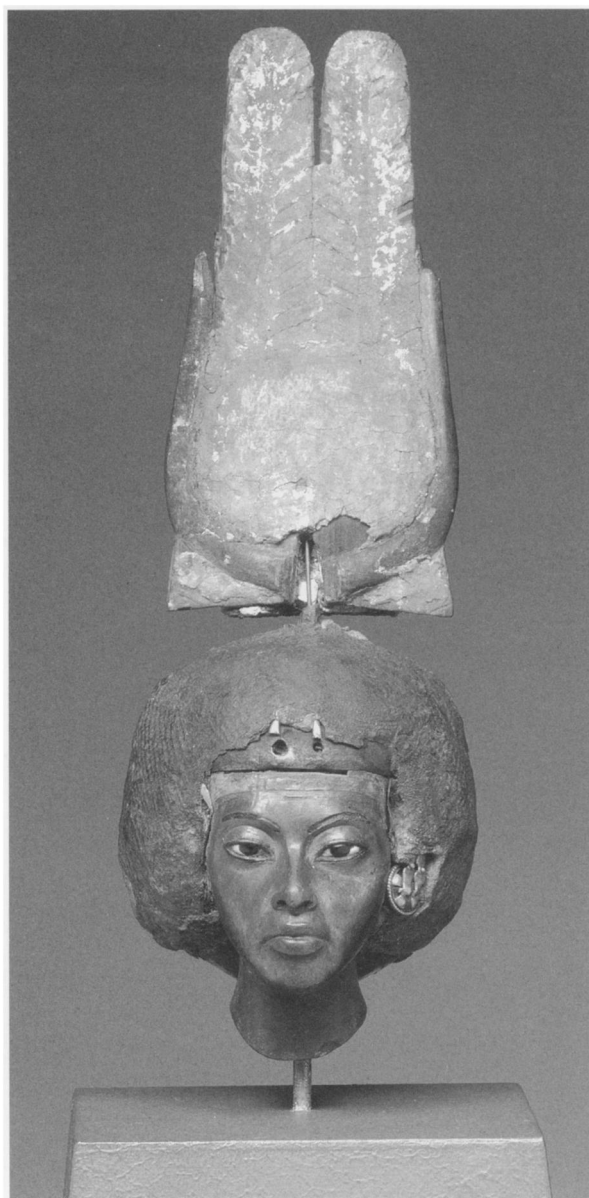


Fig. 7. Head of Queen Tiy. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY.

⁴¹ Lise Lotte Möller, *Ägyptische Kunst aus der Zeit des Königs Echnaton* (Mainz, 1965), cat. no. 38.

⁴² E.g., Louvre B6—Guillemette Andreu, Marie-Hélène Rutschowskaya, Christiane Ziegler, *L'Égypte ancienne au Louvre* (Paris, 1997), 132–33; CGC 801—Dietrich Wildung and Sylvia Schoske, *La Femme dans l'Égypte des Pharaons* (Genève, 1986), 153.

⁴³ Nina de Garis Davies and Alan Henderson Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Paintings* (Chicago, 1936), pl. 72; Max Wegner, "Stilentwicklung der Thebanischen Beamtengräber," *MDAIK* 4 (1933), pl. 26a; James Edward Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara (1908–9, 1909–10): The Monastery of Apa Jeremias* (Cairo, 1912), pl. 67; Norman de Garis Davies, *Seven Private Tombs at Kurnah* (London, 1948), pl. 5; Marcelle Werbroueck, *Les Pleureuses dans l'Égypte ancienne* (Brussels, 1938), pls. 12, 22; Norman de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Nefer-Hotep at Thebes II* (New York, 1933), pl. 4; Geoffrey Thorndike Martin, *Corpus of Reliefs of the New Kingdom from the Memphite Necropolis and Lower Egypt* (London, 1987), no. 66; Bernard Bruyère and Charles Kuentz, *La tombe de Nakht-min et la tombe d'Ari-nefer*, MIFAO 54/1 (Cairo, 1926), pl. 3.

⁴⁴ After Norman de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Two Sculptors at Thebes* (New York, 1925), pl. 21.



Fig. 8. Statue of Nefertiti. Photo Juergen Liepe. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY.



Fig. 9. Tomb-owner's widow mourning. Drawing by the author.

There may, of course, be other reasons for representing a woman's breasts as sagging—from breastfeeding,⁴⁵ or pregnancy,⁴⁶ for instance. Many of the vases in the form of pregnant women, which may have contained ointment to be rubbed on a woman's body during pregnancy,⁴⁷ have flat sagging breasts⁴⁸ (fig. 10).⁴⁹ It is significant that the women's breasts are not represented full but flat, since they could have been represented rounded and full of milk, protruding from the surface of the vessel. Since they are not, I suggest that the vases might represent women who have *already* borne several children, women of proven

⁴⁵ MMA 26.7.1405—*Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids*, 393; Moussa and Altenmüller, *Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep*, pl. 26a.

⁴⁶ O CGC 25141; MFA Boston 72.4158—Edward Brovanski, Susan Doll, and Rita Freed, *Egypt's Golden Age: The Art of Living in the New Kingdom 1558–1085 B.C.* (Boston, 1982), 226.

⁴⁷ Emma Brunner-Traut, "Gravidenflasche—Das Salben des Mutterleibes," in Arnulf Kuschke and Ernst Kutsch, eds., *Archäologie und Altes Testament: Festschrift für Kurt Galling zum 8. Jan. 1970* (Tübingen, 1970), 35–48.

⁴⁸ British Museum WA 48447—Gay Robins, *Reflections of Women in the New Kingdom* (San Antonio, Texas, 1995), 72; AEIN 1646—Mogens Jørgensen, *Catalogue: Egypt II (1550–1080 B.C.)*, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (Copenhagen, 1998), 324–25; Boston MFA 02.525—Brovanski, Doll, and Freed, *Egypt's Golden Age*, 293; Berlin Ägyptisches Museum 24018—Arne Eggebrecht, ed., *Ägyptens Aufstieg zur Weltmacht* (Mainz, 1987), 173.

⁴⁹ CGC 18418. After Mohamed Abdel-Hamid Shimy, et al., *Parfums et Cosmétiques dans l'Égypte ancienne* (Cairo, 2000), 83.



Fig. 10. Vessel depicting a pregnant woman.
Drawing by the author.

fertility and experience, characteristics which would quite literally rub off on the women who used the ointment.

b) Gauntness

Occasionally during the Old Kingdom, elderly servant women are represented as extremely gaunt, such as the statuette of the Louvre miller (fig. 1), and possibly the two women grinders Samut and Neferet (fig. 2). Although the latter might represent the concept of “leanness in the midst of plenty,” well established in Old Kingdom art, since these women also have lined faces and drooping breasts, they are likely to be old.⁵⁰

The noble lady Hathorneferhotep is also represented as extremely gaunt (fig. 4); her iliac crest clearly juts out from the surface of her dress, whereas in almost all other two-dimensional representations of women from the Old Kingdom the hip bones are represented in stylized fashion as a mere line.⁵¹

Women are also occasionally represented with the fuller figure that might be associated with middle age. One example from the late Seventeenth Dynasty exists,⁵² along with a few statuettes from the reign of Amenhotep III depicting women with a slightly fuller figure.⁵³ Queen Tiy and her husband are represented as rather stocky in build in two miniature figurines from the Römer-Pelizaus Museum in Hildesheim.⁵⁴ After the Amarna period, this image becomes slightly more common for both non-elite women⁵⁵ and women from the elite⁵⁶ (fig. 11).⁵⁷

3. Signs of Ageing in the Face

As one ages, a wrinkle (the nasolabial fold) develops along the edge of the cheek, running from the corner of the nose down towards the mouth. However, it can be difficult to distinguish between the edge of the cheek and the nasolabial fold on statues, especially in the Old Kingdom, where cheeks tend to be slightly more rounded.⁵⁸

I suggest that the nasolabial fold should at least reach a point parallel to the upper line of the upper lip to be considered a wrinkle in three-dimensional representations. In two dimensions, however, it is always possible to omit this line, so I have tended to assume that its presence is intentional.

⁵⁰ Henry George Fischer, “An example of Memphite influence in a Theban stela of the Eleventh Dynasty,” *Artibus Asiae* 22/3 (1959), 251.

⁵¹ Nadine Cherpion, “Le mastaba de Khabaousokar (MM A₂): Problèmes de chronologie,” *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 11 (1980), 81–82, 90.

⁵² Museo Egizio Turin, Cat. 3095—Gay Robins, *Beyond the Pyramids: Egyptian Regional Art from the Museo Egizio, Turin* (Emory, Atlanta, 1990), 87.

⁵³ Brooklyn Museum no. 47.120.3 Arielle P. Kozloff, Betsy M. Bryan, and Lawrence M. Berman, *Egypt's Dazzling Sun: Amenhotep III and his World* (Cleveland, 1992), 258–59; Musée du Louvre E 10655—Kozloff, Bryan and Berman, *Egypt's Dazzling Sun*, 257.

⁵⁴ Möller, *Ägyptische Kunst aus der Zeit des Königs Echnaton*, cat. no. 2.

⁵⁵ BM 48658—Lise Manniche, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Egypt*, London, 1991, pl. 18 (Musician); Bologna KS 1893—Sergio Pernigotti, ed., *La collezione Egiziana* (Bologna, 1994), 38 (mourners).

⁵⁶ André Wiese, Sylvia Winterhalter, and Andreas Brodbeck, *Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig. Die ägyptische Abteilung* (Mainz, 2001), 133 (women from stela donor's family); Mertseger, together with her husband Nakhtmin—*Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Ägyptisches Museum 1823–1973: zum 150 jährigen Bestehen der Sammlung* (Berlin, 1973), no. 40.

⁵⁷ Cairo 3.7.24.2—after Wildung and Schoske, *La Femme dans l'Égypte des Pharaons*, 174.

⁵⁸ E.g., Georg Steindorff, *Egypt* (New York, 1945), 29, or the goddesses in the Menkaure triads (George Andrew Reisner, *Mycerinus: the temples of the third pyramid at Giza* (Cambridge, Mass., 1931), pls. 41, 44.



Fig. 11. Woman with fuller figure. Drawing by the author.

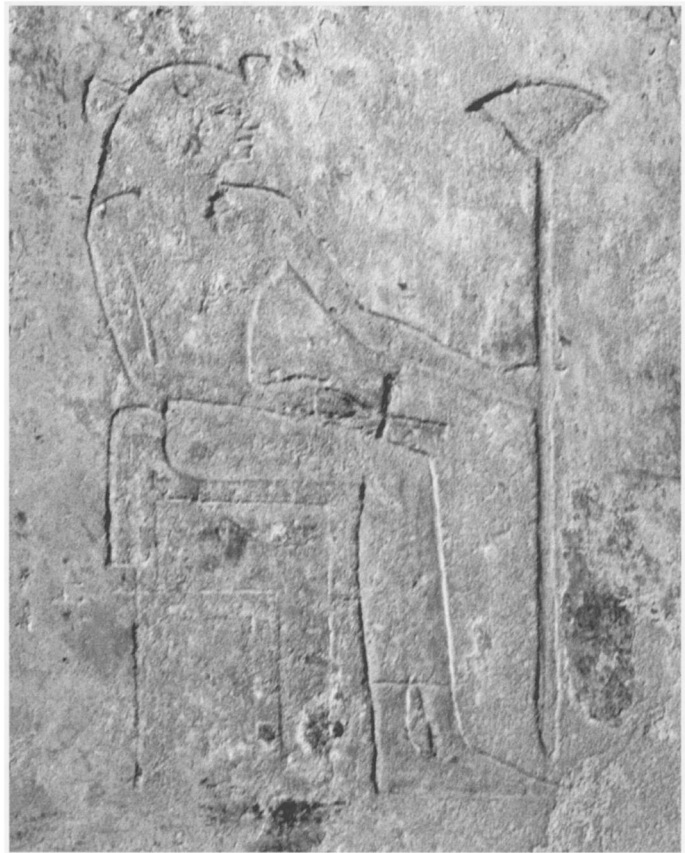


Fig. 12. Relief of Queen Khentkaus. Reproduced by the kind permission of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Prague.

However, in reliefs, if the stone is poorly preserved, it is difficult to tell the difference between damage to the stone and lines on the face.⁵⁹ Different angles of lighting effects can also influence the appearance of facial lines drastically.⁶⁰ Dietrich Wildung has recently shown that, with a change in the angle of lighting, the famous bust of Nefertiti has the first traces of a nasolabial fold, lines at the corner of her mouth and under her eyes.⁶¹

In the Old Kingdom elite women are occasionally depicted with nasolabial folds, such as Queen Khentkaus on a pillar on the portico in her pyramid complex at Abusir (fig. 12),⁶² or the false door of Princess *Mrt.it.s*.⁶³ This is also true in the Middle Kingdom.⁶⁴ One particularly interesting statue

⁵⁹ E.g., Selim Hassan and Abdelsalam Abdelsalam, *Excavations at Giza*, vol. 2, 1930–1931 (Cairo, 1936), pl. 78.

⁶⁰ Yvonne Harpur, *The Tombs of Nefermaat and Rahotep at Meidum: Discovery, Destruction and Reconstruction* (Oxford, 2001), 263–68.

⁶¹ Dietrich Wildung, “Nofretetes Neues Gesicht,” *Amun- Mazagin für die Freunde der Ägyptischen Museen* 3/11 (2001), 6–9.

⁶² Miroslav Verner, *Abusir III: The Pyramid Complex of Khentkaus* (Prague, 1995), frontispiece and front cover.

⁶³ Boston Museum of Fine Arts 12.1510—R. J. Leprohon, *Corpus Antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum Boston Museum of Fine Arts*, vol. 2, *Stelae I* (Mainz 1985), 2.82–85. Also Museo Egizio di Firenze Inv. no. 1815—Pier Roberto del Francia and Maria Cristina Guidotti, *Cento immagini femminili nel Museo Egizio di Firenze* (Florence, 2002), 94, 104; Cairo JdE 35137—Michel Valloggia, *Au coeur d'une pyramide. Une mission archéologique à Égypte* (Lausanne, 2001), 91.

⁶⁴ Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden, *Gids voor de verzameling van Egyptische Beeldhouwwerken* (Leiden, 1961), ill. 9; Strasbourg Inv. No. 11.987.0.159—Annie Schweitzer, Claude Traunecker, *Strasbourg, musée archéologique; Antiquités égyptiennes de la collection G. Schlumberger* (Strasbourg, 1988), 24.

from the Middle Kingdom depicts a queen with nasolabial folds and deep bags under the eyes,⁶⁵ probably derived from contemporary male royal statuary. Elite women from the Old Kingdom⁶⁶ are also occasionally depicted with downturned mouth, or lines at the corner of their mouths. Non-elite women may be represented with more pronounced wrinkles. In the Old Kingdom, most of these examples are millers.⁶⁷ The miller Samut on the false door of Itefnen and Peritem in the Cairo Museum⁶⁸ has a line running from nose to mouth and another deep wrinkle on her cheek. A Middle Kingdom statuette of a Beduin woman shows her with two deep concave creases running from her nose to her chin.⁶⁹ Similar creases also appear in two-dimensional representations from the Middle Kingdom⁷⁰ where they might represent a fusion of the nasolabial fold and the line at the corner of the mouth, although at this period women are also represented with both nasolabial fold and downturned mouth.⁷¹

A royal statue from the late Seventeenth or early Eighteenth Dynasty shows its owner with nasolabial folds.⁷² In the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty, by contrast, women are not represented with facial wrinkles. Nasolabial folds reappear in the reign of Amenhotep III,⁷³ but statues and reliefs of Tiy (fig. 7) and Nefertiti show them with more pronounced signs of ageing, such as downturned mouth, or lines at the corner of the mouth, drooping cheeks, lines from nose to mouth and heavy lidded eyes.⁷⁴

A few other women at this period adopted this image of the wise older woman and presumably found it attractive. Two examples are particularly striking, since they involve women incorporating old age into their repertoire for the afterlife: the cultic singer of the god Aten, Isis, owned an ushabti (fig. 13)⁷⁵ whose face bears a strong resemblance to the head of Queen Tiy from the Berlin Museum.⁷⁶ The head of an older woman from the workshop of the sculptor Dhutmose shows a greater variety of wrinkles than any other depiction of an elite woman from ancient Egypt (wrinkles at the corner of the eyes, bags under the eyes, wrinkles across the forehead) (fig. 14).⁷⁷ The plaster heads

⁶⁵ Berlin AMP 14475—Dietrich Wildung, *Ägypten 2000 v. Chr. Die Geburt des Individuums* (München, 2000), 143.

⁶⁶ Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim 3113a-c—Karl Martin, *Corpus Antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum, Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim 7, Reliefs des Alten Reiches II*, 7.90–94; Ahmed M. Moussa and Hartwig Altenmüller, *The Tomb of Nefer and Ka-Hay* (Mainz, 1971), pl. 33; AEIN 672—Maria Mogensen, *La Glyptothèque Ny Carlsberg. La collection égyptienne* (Copenhagen, 1930), pl. 12.

⁶⁷ CGC 110, 114; Hearst Museum 6-19766 in Capel and Markoe, *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven*, 91.

⁶⁸ Cherpion, "La fausse-portre d'Itefnen et Peritem," pl. 17.

⁶⁹ Janine Bourriau, ed., *Pharaohs and Mortals: Egyptian Art in the Middle Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1988), 108–9.

⁷⁰ Florence Inv. No. 7400—Sergio Bosticco, *Museo Archaeologico di Firenze, Le Stele Egiziane dell' Antico al Nuovo Regno* (Rome, 1959), 59; Vienna AS 5897—Irmgard Hein and Helmut Satzinger, *Stelen des Mittleren Reiches II. Corpus antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Lieferung 7* (Mainz, 1993), 7.153–57.

⁷¹ Allard Pearson Museum 25—Pieter Adrian Art Boeser, *Beschreibung der Ägyptischen Sammlung des Niederländischen Reichsmuseums der Altertümer in Leiden. Die Denkmäler der Zeit zwischen dem alten und mittleren Reich und des mittleren Reiches. Erste Abteilung: Stelen* (The Hague, 1909), pl. 33.

⁷² MMA 16.10.224—Manfred Bietak and Irmgard Hein (eds.), *Pharaonen und Fremden. Dynastien im Dunkel* (Wien, 1994), no. 369.

⁷³ Mourner in tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky: Davies, *Tomb of Two Sculptors*, pl. 20 (although Werbroueck, *Les Pleureuses*, 132, remarks that the lines traced on the woman's face might be the traces of tears or scratches); Vienna AS 9226—Michaela Hüttner and Helmut Satzinger, *Stelen, Inschriftsteine und Reliefs aus der Zeit der 18. Dynastie. Corpus antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Lieferung 16* (Mainz, 1999), 16, 142–44.

⁷⁴ For Nefertiti see Rita Freed, Yvonne Markowitz and Sue d'Auria, *Pharaohs of the Sun* (Boston, 1999), 115, 216; Arnold, *The Royal Women of Amarna*, fig. 62; Ludwig Borchardt, *Porträts der Königin Nofretete aus der Grabungen 1912/13 in Tell el-Amarna* (Leipzig, 1923), 11; Bernard von Bothmer, in: Emma Swan Hall (ed.), *Antiquities from the Collection of Christos G. Bastis* (Mainz, 1988), 32; Joachim Selim Karig and Karl Theodor Zauzich, *Ägyptische Kunst aus dem Brooklyn Museum* (Berlin, 1976), no. 42; possibly Arnold, *The Royal Women of Amarna*, 6, 9. For Tiy see Arnold, *Royal Women of Amarna*, figs. 23, 24.

⁷⁵ Purchase, Fletcher Fund and the Guide Foundation, Inc. Gift, 1966, MMA 66.99.38. Reproduced by the kind permission of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

⁷⁶ A court lady depicted in a relief on loan to the Brooklyn Museum L72.17 has a line at the corner of her mouth. Cyril Aldred, *Akhenaten and Nefertiti* (Brooklyn, 1973), 199.

⁷⁷ Ägyptisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Inv. No. 21261.



Fig. 13. Ushabti of the songstress of Aten, Isis. Purchase, Fletcher Fund and the Guide Foundation, Inc. Gift, 1966, MMA 66.99.38. Reproduced by the kind permission of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 14. Head of elder woman from the workshop of Thutmose at el-Amarna. Photo Juergen Liepe. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kultbesitz/ Art Resource, NY.

of non-royal persons from Dhutmose's workshop may have been models for tomb statues.⁷⁸ If so, a court lady, and/or the members of her family, wanted her to be represented as an older woman in one of the most important contexts of self-presentation.

Dominique Laboury suggests that other royal heads, including several from the workshop of Dhutmose featuring downturned mouth, lines at the corners of the mouth, and lines running from mouth to nose, represent Neferneferuaten, the successor of Akhenaten.⁷⁹ Following

⁷⁸ Arnold, *Royal Women of Amarna*, 51. However, Aldred, *Akhenaten and Nefertiti*, 46 suggests that it might have been a portrait-study of one of the foreign women in the king's harem. In that case, it is more difficult to imagine a setting for the tomb statue: would women from the royal household, who had no other family, have been buried in one of the North or South tombs? No such tomb has been found until now. On the other hand, what other setting might have been appropriate for such a statue?

⁷⁹ Dimitry Laboury, "Mise au point sur l'iconographie de Neferneferuaton, le prédécesseur de Toutankhamon," in: Mahmoud Eldamaty and Mai Trad, eds. *Egyptian Museum Collections around the World*, vol. 1 (Cairo, 2002), 711–22.



Fig. 15. Queen Nofertari, from her tomb in the Valley of the Queens. Drawing by the author.

Krauss and Gabolde,⁸⁰ Laboury equates this individual with Akhenaten's oldest daughter Meritaten. I do not intend to discuss the complex and controversial issue of Neferneferuaten's identity here, but merely to comment that, if this is in fact the case, this could be considered the greatest triumph of the image of the older, experienced woman, since it was adopted for the iconography of a woman ruler who was probably at the most in her early twenties.⁸¹

After the Amarna period, elite and non-elite women were at times portrayed with nasolabial folds,⁸² lines at the corner of the mouth,⁸³ or downturned mouth.⁸⁴ The nasolabial fold sometimes continues downwards and fuses with the line at the corner of the mouth.⁸⁵ These features occasionally appeared in depictions of very highly placed women, such as Queen Nofertari in her tomb in the Valley of the Queens⁸⁶ (fig. 15).⁸⁷

Bags under the eyes⁸⁸ appear, but very rarely, at all periods, and lines running from the corner of the eye⁸⁹ appear occasionally during the Old Kingdom and from the Amarna period onwards.

⁸⁰ Rolf Krauss, *Das Ende der Amarnazeit*, Hildesheimer Ägyptologische Beiträge 7 (Hildesheim, 1978), 43–46; Marc Gabolde, *D'Akhenaton à Toutankhâmun* (Lyon, 1998), 183–85.

⁸¹ Meritaten's age is unknown, but since she is depicted as a toddler on the relief blocks from the temples that Akhenaten built at Karnak in the first years of his seventeen-year reign, she must have been born early in his reign or even before he became king. D. B. Redford, *Akhenaten, the Heretic King* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1984), 79.

⁸² Munich Gl. WAF 33–D. Wildung (ed.), *Katalog der Staatlichen Sammlung Ägyptischer Kunst*, 2. ed. (Munich, 1976), 129; Geoffrey Thorndike Martin, *The Hidden Tombs of Memphis* (London, 1991), fig. 84; BM No. 285–Terence Garnet Henry James, ed., *Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian Stelae, etc.* part 9 (London, 1970), pl. 45.

⁸³ TT 1 Arpag Mekhitarian, Marc Kunnen and René Wullemans, *Passage vers l'éternité* (Paris, 1989), 111, 114; TT 178 de Garis Davies and Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Paintings*, pl. 94; Brovarski, Doll, and Freed, *Egypt's Golden Age*, 263; Emma Brunner-Traut, *Die altägyptischen Scherbenbilder (Bildostraka) der Deutschen Museen und Sammlungen* (Wiesbaden, 1956), pl. 23, no. 59; Louvre Inv. A 16–Guillemette Andreu, ed., *Les artistes de Pharaon* (Paris, 2002), 265 (Twentieth Dynasty); Jadwiga Lipinska et al., *Geheimnisvolle Königin Hatshepsut. Ägyptische Kunst des 15. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (Warsaw, 1997), 80.

⁸⁴ Louvre E 3028–Lawrence Michael Berman and Bernadette Letellier, *Pharaohs: Treasures of Egyptian Art from the Louvre* (Cleveland, 1996), 66.

⁸⁵ Pieter Adrian Art Boeser, *Beschreibung der Ägyptischen Sammlung des Niederländischen Reichsmuseums der Altertümer in Leiden, Neues Reich, Erste Abteilung* (The Hague, 1911), pl. 9; Shafik Allam, *Some pages from everyday life in ancient Egypt* (Giza, 1985), 20; Cairo JdE 43573–Bernard Bruyère, "Quelques stèles trouvées par M. É. Baraize à Deir el-Médineh," *ASAE* 25 (1925), pl. 3.2; Florence Museum Inv. No. 2522–Sergio Bosticco, *Museo Archeologico di Firenze: Le Stele Egiziane del Nuovo Regno* (Rome, 1965), no. 47; Florence Museum Inv. No. 2591, Bosticco, *Le Stele Egiziane del Nuovo Regno*, no. 48; Kestner-Museum, Hannover, Inv. No. 4506–Rosemarie Drenkhahn, *Ägyptische Reliefs im Kestner-Museum, Hannover* (Hannover, 1989), 129.

⁸⁶ John K. McDonald, *House of Eternity. The Tomb of Nefertari* (London, 1996), 107.

⁸⁷ After Barbara Lesko, *The Remarkable Women of Ancient Egypt*, 2d ed. (Berkeley, California, 1987), plate following p. 12.

⁸⁸ Old Kingdom servants–Louvre miller (fig. 1); miller Samut on the false door Cairo JdE 56994 (fig. 2); Middle Kingdom elite women–D Wildung, *Ägypten 2000 v. Chr.*, 143; Middle Kingdom non-elite women–Bourriau (ed.), *Pharaohs and Mortals*, 108–9; Amarna period–Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Inv. No. 21261 (fig. 14).

⁸⁹ Old Kingdom–Moussa and Altenmüller, *Nianchnum und Chnumhotep*, pl. 26a; del Francia and Guidotti, *Cento immagini femminili*, 94, 104; Amarna period (fig. 8); Arnold, *The Royal Women of Amarna*, fig. 62; Late-Eighteenth Dynasty–British Museum EA 644–Richard B. Parkinson, *Cracking Codes. The Rosetta Stone and Decipherment* (London, 1999), 64.

In the Old Kingdom, elite women are very occasionally represented with a sagging chin, such as Hathorneferhotep, Nianchnum's wife Khentikhaus,⁹⁰ and Werbau's wife.⁹¹ This feature reappears occasionally after the Amarna period both for mourners⁹² and members of the elite.⁹³

4. White Hair

During the New Kingdom,⁹⁴ people were occasionally represented with white hair (or perhaps white wigs). Occasionally, white streaks were painted into dark hair to give a pepper-and-salt or gray-ing effect, as for the tomb owner's relatives in the tomb of Pashed at Deir el-Medina.⁹⁵ In depictions of the elite, white hair is not necessarily combined with signs of ageing on the face and body, but in the tombs of Neferhotep⁹⁶ and Nebamun and Ipuky,⁹⁷ older women mourners are sometimes depicted with white hair and drooping breasts or sagging chin.

White hair is more common for men⁹⁸ than for women,⁹⁹ and begins earlier in the Eighteenth Dynasty, originally with male servants and slightly later for the tomb-owner. By contrast, the earliest example of a woman with white hair is a mourner from the tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky,¹⁰⁰ dated to the late reign of Amenhotep III or the early reign of Akhenaten.¹⁰¹ However, it is possible that the gray hair of women mourners was actually caused by throwing dust over their hair,¹⁰² in which case the earliest examples of women with white hair appear after the Amarna period, the Nubian taxpayers in the tomb of Huy, dating to the reign of Tutankhamun.¹⁰³

⁹⁰ Moussa and Altenmüller, *Nianchnum und Khnumhotep*, Ill. 19. Many thanks to Yvonne Harpur for this reference.

⁹¹ Moussa and Altenmüller, *Nefer and Ka-Hay*, pl. 37.

⁹² Birmingham City Museum No. 686'66—John Ruffle, "Four Egyptian Pieces in Birmingham City Museum," *JEA* 53 (1967), pl. 7.

⁹³ Cleveland Museum 1963.100—Lawrence Michael Berman *et al.*, *The Cleveland Museum of Art: Catalogue of Egyptian Art* (New York, 1999), 250 (tomb owner's wife and other relative); Henricus Petrus Bremmer, *Egyptische Kunst uit het Museum te Leiden* (Utrecht, 1937), 20 (tomb owner's wife).

⁹⁴ White hair does not normally appear as a characteristic of ageing before the New Kingdom, although this may simply be an accident of preservation. For a possible earlier example see Dieter Arnold, *Der Tempel des Königs Mentuhotep von Deir el Bahari*, vol. 2 (Mainz, 1974), pl. 62.

⁹⁵ Alan-Pierre Zivie, *La tombe de Pached à Deir el-Médineh* [No. 3] (MIFAO 99) (Cairo, 1979), pl. 24. Baines, *Fecundity Figures*, 127 suggests that three different stages of life or three generations may be represented here. Cf. Bernard Bruyère, *La tombe no. 1 de Sen-Nedjem à Deir el Médineh*, MIFAO 88 (Cairo, 1959), pl. 28.

⁹⁶ Norman de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Nefer-Hotep at Thebes*, vol. 2 (New York, 1933), pl. 5.

⁹⁷ Davies, *Tomb of Two Sculptors*, pl. 20.

⁹⁸ Davies, *Nefer-Hotep*, vol. 2, pls. 5 (mourners), 6 (tomb owner); Bernard Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el-Médineh* (1927), FIFAO 5 (Cairo 1928) 57 (tomb owner), 81 (tomb owner); Bernard Bruyère and Charles Kuentz, *Tombes thébaines. La nécropole de Deir el-Médineh. La tombe de Nakht-min et la tombe d'Ari-nefer*. Tome premier, MIFAO 54.1 (Cairo, 1926), pl. 19 (tomb owner's father); Andreu, *Les artistes de Pharaon*, fig. 31 (tomb owner); Dominique Valbelle and Jean-François Gout, *Les artistes de la vallée des rois* (Paris, 2002), 78 (tomb owner's father), 155 (tomb owner's father); Terence Garnet Henry James, *Egyptian Painting* (London, 1985), 56 (Ani depicted in the presence of Osiris in his Book of the Dead); Davies, *Two Ramesside Tombs*, pl. 31b (priest and craftsman); tomb of Menna—Robert Boulanger, *Egyptian Painting and the Near East* (London, 1966), 59 (servant), 60 (servants); Tomb of Nakht, Aude Gros de Beler, *Vivre en Égypte au temps de Pharaon: le message de la peinture égyptienne* (Paris, 2001), 81 (servants); Zivie, *La tombe de Pached*, pl. 24 (tomb owner's father); Wegner, "Stilentwicklung der Thebanischen Beamtengräber," pl. 26b (male mourner).

⁹⁹ Davies, *Nefer-Hotep*, vol. 2, pl. 5 (mourners); Valbelle and Gout, *Les artistes de la vallée des rois*, 78 (tomb owner's mother); Davies, *Two Ramesside Tombs*, pl. 12 (mourner); Bernard Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el-Médineh* (1934–35) 3, FIFAO 17 (Cairo, 1939), 194 (house owner on jamb of naos).

¹⁰⁰ Davies, *Tomb of Two Sculptors*, pl. 20.

¹⁰¹ Davies, *Tomb of Two Sculptors*, 19.

¹⁰² Werbroueck, *Les Pleureuses*, 131–32.

¹⁰³ Wreszinski, *Atlas I*, 158.

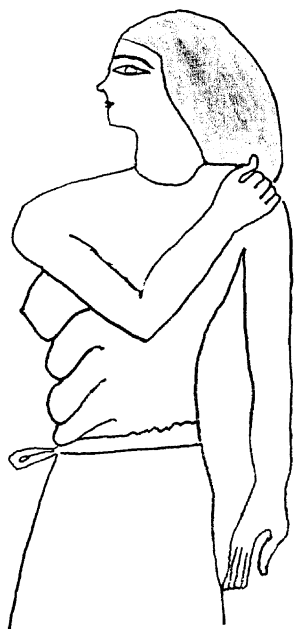


Fig. 16. Overseer of the weaving workshop in the tomb of Khumhotep at Beni Hasan. Drawing by the author.

5. Contrast with the Depiction of Male Ageing

Various characteristics of ageing rarely or never appear when older women are depicted, but may be used to depict older men:

First, partial baldness due to hair loss may be used to denote male ageing¹⁰⁴ but is never used to denote female ageing. Given that hair was constructed as a major erotic signal for women in ancient Egypt¹⁰⁵ in a way that it was not for men, it is not surprising that female hair loss is not represented.

Second, certain sets of wrinkles are never associated with women: such as vertical lines of concentration¹⁰⁶ between the eyes. Lines across the forehead and hooded eyes are much rarer for women than for men. It has sometimes been argued from the Egyptian artistic convention of representing women with paler skins than men that women tended to be less exposed to the sun than men,¹⁰⁷ so this distinction may have some basis in reality.

Third, multiple folds of fat on the lower torso are rare for women but are a well-established part of the image of mature elite men¹⁰⁸ and occasionally their attendants.¹⁰⁹ For this reason, I argue that two images which have been suggested to be female are not necessarily so. The figure of the overseer of the weaving workshop in the tomb of Khnumhotep at Beni Hasan has been said to represent a woman overseer¹¹⁰ (fig. 16),¹¹¹ but is actually is very similar to a scribe who appears elsewhere on the same wall.¹¹² A vessel from the Brooklyn Museum that has been suggested to represent a midwife¹¹³ (fig. 17)¹¹⁴ poses more difficulties, because it has a long thick plait, reminiscent of certain New Kingdom vessels in female form¹¹⁵ but not characteristic of male iconography.

¹⁰⁴ E.g., Annelies and Artur Brack, *Das Grab des Haremheb. Theben Nr. 78* (Mainz, 1980), pl. 73; Joseph John Tylor and Francis Llewellyn Griffith, *The Tomb of Paheri at El Kab* (London, 1894), pls. 3, 4. However, baldness may also have cultic connotations: see, for example, Jacques Jean Clère, *Les chauves d'Hathor*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 63 (Leuven, 1995).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Phillipe Derchain, "La perruque et le crystal," *SAK* 2 (1975), 55–74; Gay Robins, "Hair and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Egypt c. 1480–1350 B.C.," *JARCE* 36 (1999), 63.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Wildung, *Sesostris und Amenemhet*, 203; Wildung, *Ägypten 2000 v. Chr.*, 110, 111.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Gay Robins, "Some Images of Women in New Kingdom Art and Literature," in Barbara Lesko ed., *Women's Earliest Records from Ancient Egypt and Western Asia*, *Brown Judaic Studies* 166 (Atlanta, Georgia, 1989), 108.

¹⁰⁸ Kent Weeks, *The Anatomical Knowledge of the Ancient Egyptians and the Representation of the Human Figure in Egyptian Art* (UMI dissertation, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1971), 99–107.

¹⁰⁹ Weeks, *Anatomical Knowledge of the Ancient Egyptians*, 108–9.

¹¹⁰ Catherine Roehrig, "Women's work: Some occupations of nonroyal women as depicted in ancient Egyptian art," in Capel and Markoe, *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven*, 20.

¹¹¹ After Capel and Markoe, *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven*, 20.

¹¹² Percy E. Newberry, *Beni Hasan I* (London, 1893), pl. 29.

¹¹³ H. Rand, "Figure-Vases in Ancient Egypt and Hebrew Midwives," *Israel Exploration Journal* 20 (1970), 209–12.

¹¹⁴ After Brovarski, Doll, and Freed, *Egypt's Golden Age*, 292.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt, "Pots anthropomorphes et recettes magico-médicales dans l'Égypte ancienne," *RdE* 9 (1952), 49–67.

6. Body Modification



Fig. 17. Vessel representing a kneeling person. Drawing by the author.

Is it possible that these culturally preferred images of youth and slenderness¹¹⁶ impinged on people's consciousness to the point where they tried to reverse their own ageing processes? Although we know nothing about Egyptians trying to slim, there is other evidence that Egyptians attempted to modify their bodies to approximate a cultural ideal of beauty as youth—notably the remedy for sagging breasts in the medical papyri¹¹⁷ and the recipes for hair dye (for both sexes),¹¹⁸ and wrinkles.¹¹⁹ This tendency is epitomized most clearly in the caption for a recipe from Papyrus Edwin Smith v.21.9ff. for combating the *hnt*-disease¹²⁰ and skin disease on the face or head, which reads "Transforming an old man into a young one." However, there is some indication that these pressures could have been more powerful for women. The treatment for sagging breasts was gender-specific; no male equivalent exists, probably since rolls of fat on the torso were part of the positive image of mature masculinity.

7. Conclusions

At most periods the representation of elite women tended to hint at ageing with a wrinkle or two, both when portrayed with their spouses and when alone. These varied slightly from period to period; for instance, gauntness is more typical of the Old Kingdom, but white hair is very rarely found before the New Kingdom. In the Middle Kingdom, for instance, the nasolabial fold and line at the corner of the mouth might be combined into a single line. In the early New Kingdom, before the reign of Amenhotep III, elite women are very rarely shown with signs of ageing.

The occasional more daring or extreme portrayals of female ageing tend to be associated with women alone, as far as I can tell, such as Hemy-Re's false door or Hathorneferhotep's reliefs in her own chapel. But it is possible to interpret these women as making a bid for images of experience and wisdom, especially in contexts where they did not need to appear as their husband's desirable partner.

However, it was only briefly in the Amarna period, with the sponsorship of the queen and the queen mother, that this image was appropriated more widely. It seems that the Amarna queens' initiative to establish a strongly marked image of female ageing, parallel to male images of wisdom and success, was not taken up later. Like other ways of depicting Amarna queens—smiting enemies, driving in chariots, offering sacrifices in their own right—the image of the wise older woman may

¹¹⁶ For such pressures in contemporary society see Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1993), 139–212; Andrew Blaikie, *Ageing and popular culture* (Cambridge, 1999), 23, 138; Sara Arber and Jay Ginn, *Gender and Later Life. A Sociological Analysis of Resources and Constraints* (London, 1991), 42–43; Terri Apter, *Secret Paths. Women in the New Midlife* (New York and London, 1995), 60–77.

¹¹⁷ P. Ebers 808.

¹¹⁸ See Wolfhart Westendorf, *Handbuch der altägyptischen Medizin*, HdO 1/36 (Leiden, 1999), 454–55. The body of a woman buried at Hierakonpolis shows that use of henna was used to cover up graying hair as far back the mid-fourth millennium B.C.E. (<http://www.hierakonpolis.org/site/moremummies2.html>).

¹¹⁹ Westendorf, *Handbuch*, 456.

¹²⁰ Westendorf, *Handbuch*, 140 suggests that the *hnt* disease was catarrh.

have been considered too characteristic of the Amarna heresy and later women preferred to distance themselves from it.

However, the Amarna period nonetheless brought changes in the depiction of women's ageing. Although elite women did not adopt this strongly marked image of ageing, they appeared again with signs of ageing, such as lines on their faces, drooping breasts and, for the first time, white hair and thicker bodies. Characteristics of ageing also became more widespread in the depiction of non-elite women.

Wisdom and experience may also explain why older or mature women are sometimes included in groups of women workers. This might just be to vary the group and make it more interesting visually, but it might also mean that the workforce at the tomb owner's disposal included older women with resources of skill and experience; Norman de Garis Davies noted that senior workmen were often represented executing tasks which required these traits.¹²¹ These older women are not usually shown leading the work, but they could teach, advise and enrich the activities when needed. However, this explanation does not fit every case, since there are also representations of aged women grinding corn, a job where expertise did not increase with the passage of time.

The same may apply to foreign women who are also shown with signs of ageing.¹²² As prisoners of war, they would be potential workers. However, as Thomas Gilroy recently argued, this may be a type of caricature, differentiating between the Egyptian norm and the non-Egyptian other.¹²³

Women were thus in a double bind. In order to appropriate images of experience and wisdom, they also had to depart from the socially dictated female norm of youth and beauty and risk being associated with the strange and laughable—a problem which is with us still.

In undertaking this work, I had hoped to uncover empowering images of women's ageing. The reality seems more complicated, with ageing often being stigmatized and associated with outsiders and subordinates. For women, it was difficult for ageing to provide a positive counterpoint to youth and beauty.

Attempts to reclaim the attributes of ageing as a source of authority and experience only gathered a limited momentum when initiated by the queen, the most important and powerful woman in the land. All the more, then, we should respect women who made the brave and extraordinary gesture of reclaiming, in some small way, their age and experience.

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¹²¹ Norman de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Puyemrê at Thebes*, vol. 2 (New York, 1923), 74, 76.

¹²² E.g., Nina de Garis Davies and Alan H. Gardiner, *The Tomb of Huy, Viceroy of Nubia in the Reign of Tutankhamun* (No. 40) (London, 1926), pl. 30.

¹²³ Thomas Gilroy, "Outlandish Outlanders: Foreigners and Caricature in Egyptian Art," *Göttinger Miszellen* 191 (2002), 35–52.

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'HOMOSEXUAL' DESIRE AND MIDDLE KINGDOM LITERATURE*

By R. B. PARKINSON

Sexual activity is a constant feature of human society, but sexuality has to be studied as a distinct cultural construct. It is articulated in texts and other cultural artefacts. Extant references to sexual acts between men in Middle Kingdom texts are few. In religious and commemorative texts such acts were presented as aggressive, but literary works accommodated a recognition of 'homosexual' desire. Two conclusions are suggested from this: that sexual relationships between men were considered irregular by the literate elite, and that the decorum of official texts differed from that of literary (fictional) texts. Three works in particular are discussed: the *Teaching of Ptahhotep*, the *Tale of Horus and Seth*, and the *Tale of Neferkare and Saset*.

In this place seemeth to be some savour of disorderly love, which the learned call paederastice: but it is gathered beside his meaning. E. Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calender, Januarye* (1579); gloss to l. 55

The cultural construction of sexuality

ALTHOUGH sexual activity may be a biological given, sexuality is, as Michel Foucault argued, a variable cultural artefact, a way of putting sex into discourse; as such, 'the history of sexuality ... must first be written from the viewpoint of a history of discourses'.¹ Between modern expressions of sexuality and those of ancient Egypt differences are immediately apparent.² For example, explicitly sexual motifs seem to have had a relatively limited role in art and literature: both text and representations offer a high proportion of coded images or metaphors,³ and the higher levels of representational art are reticent about sexual activity,⁴ although direct representations and references to sexual acts and potency occur in sacred contexts. Direct representations of sexual acts occur more frequently in the less exalted levels of art found on ostraca and, in one case, papyrus.⁵ Similarly, love-magic is attested by only one extant example in the pharaonic textual record, although it is common in Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri.⁶

*I am indebted to John Baines for commenting on drafts, and am grateful to the *JEA*'s referees, to Janine Bourriau for discussing the 'catamite' figure (see n. 48), to Jacobus van Dijk for letting me cite his article in press (see n. 33), to Andrea McDowell and Deborah Sweeney for providing me with invaluable references, and to T. G. Reid for much help.

¹M. Foucault, *A History of Sexuality*, I: *An Introduction* (trans. R. Hurley; Harmondsworth, 1981). Quotation from p. 69.

²L. Manniche offers a popular account in *Sexual Life in Ancient Egypt* (London and New York, 1987); review by G. Robins, 'Ancient Egyptian Sexuality', *DE* 11 (1988), 61–72.

³L. Störk, 'Erotik', *LÄ* II, 4–11.

⁴For example, P. Derchain, 'Symbols and Metaphors in Literature and Representations of Private Life', *Royal Anthropological Institute News* 15 (1976), 7–10.

⁵J. A. Omlin, *Der Papyrus 55001 und seine satirisch-erotischen Zeichnungen und Inschriften* (Turin, 1968), with examples of other representations.

⁶P. Smither, 'A Ramesside Love Charm', *JEA* 27 (1941), 131–2. The similarity of Coffin Text Spell 576 (CT VI, 191a–p) to a love-spell (J. F. Borghouts, *An Introductory Guide to the Coffin Texts* (Amsterdam, 1973), 3), suggests that such spells existed in the Middle Kingdom. One Coptic love-charm from the sixth

Little explicit discourse about sexuality is preserved in the Egyptian record, and many scholars have argued that such discourse is almost exclusively a modern category.⁷ Nevertheless, linguistic and artefactual sources can be examined to deduce attitudes to sexual acts and desires, but as the subject is surrounded by modern as well as ancient taboos, analysis has often proved problematic.⁸ Rather than drawing on evidence relating to sexual acts in general, it is preferable to treat a limited sample, in order to exploit the methodological models offered by recent research. Same-gender sexual acts offer a suitable range of evidence for such an approach: they have been considered 'disorderly' and 'unspeakable' by many cultures, and their minority status can provide insights into the assumptions implicit in 'normal' sexuality. The methodological issues surrounding sexuality are clear in the formulation of this problematic type of sexual acts. The first phase of research into this minority tendency—especially in American and English-speaking scholarship—has been a process of historical reclamation, particularly of identifying periods of repression and of providing positive images, such as the work of Boswell on the medieval period.⁹ Little such material can be recovered from pre-Classical cultures, and studies that include Egypt often do so as part of a prologue to later periods, particularly in order to provide a context for the influential Biblical examples;¹⁰ an exception is the thorough sociological survey of Greenberg.¹¹ In more recent years historians such as Halperin have continued to concentrate on the well-known and extensive Classical evidence, but have increasingly discussed the subject in social terms, questioning the definition of historical 'homosexuality'.¹²

'Homosexuality' is a modern scientific construct, as is the division of sexuality into two (largely exclusive) categories of 'homosexuals' and 'heterosexuals',¹³ although historical evidence is sufficient to show that people who have same-sex relationships are not restricted to the modern world. This dichotomy has led to the controversy between the 'essentialist' and the 'constructivist' approaches in which homosexuality is an 'essential' unvariable feature of human nature, or is a variable cultural construct; most studies adopt

century AD is between two men (Smither, 'A Coptic Love-Charms', *JEA* 25 (1939), 173–4), but the genders in this are probably due to the post-Hellenistic context, despite the spell's similarities with earlier pharaonic rites (R. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago, 1993), 178).

⁷ See, for example, the 'Introduction' in D. M. Halperin et al. (eds), *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton, 1990), 3–20. A now classic treatment of the problems of discussing ancient sexuality is R. Padgug, 'Sexual Matters: Rethinking Sexuality in History' (1979), reprinted in M. B. Duberman et al. (eds), *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Lesbian and Gay Past* (London, 1989), 54–64.

⁸ For scholarly reticence see, for example, J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago, 1980), 18–22; E. Richter-Ærøe, 'Sisenet und Phiops II.', *LÄ* V, 957; Smither, *JEA* 25, 173 n. 5 (an 'embarrassing' love charm between men).

⁹ For a specific example see Boswell's defence of using the word 'gay' in a historical research (*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 41–59).

¹⁰ For example, P. Coleman, *Christian Attitudes to Homosexuality* (London, 1980), 54–5.

¹¹ D. F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago and London, 1988), 127–35.

¹² D. M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (London, 1990); other works cited below.

¹³ For example, Halperin, *One Hundred Years*, in particular the title essay (15–40), and Chapter 2, "'Homosexuality': A Cultural Construct" (41–53). See also Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality, passim*.

in varying degrees a constructionist approach, in which sexuality is viewed as being culturally determined rather than a universal given.¹⁴

It is now widely accepted that sexuality as a dominant characterising force was not recognised in the ancient world: sexual preferences were acknowledged, but only as one would recognise someone's taste in food without characterising him or her on that basis as a member of a sub-species of mankind. In Europe and the Mediterranean, personal identity seems not to have been defined in terms of sexual preferences before at least the seventeenth century AD,¹⁵ and 'homosexual' misdeeds were viewed as part of fleshly weakness to which all people were prone.¹⁶

Halperin has argued that the issue is not to analyse how an ancient society was able to articulate an experience that is now called 'homosexuality', but is 'to recover the terms in which the experiences of individuals belonging to past societies were actually constituted'. Thus the historian should not 'trace the history of "homosexuality"' as if it were a *thing*, but instead 'analyze how the significance of same-sex sexual contacts has been variously constructed over time by members of human living-groups'.¹⁷

I do not offer here a discussion of sexuality and taxonomy but, as Foucault suggested, of discourses. The New Historicist critic Bruce Smith, who has analysed erotic themes in English Renaissance literature,¹⁸ summarises his approach as follows:

To assume, as some modernist critics have done, that 'official' discourse—moral, legal, and medical—is always in control of poetic discourse is, surely, just as naive as to assume that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind. Rather than dictating or being dictated to, poetic discourse often *mediates* between the ideal prescriptions of philosophy and the untidy facts of history. ... The function of ideology, Marx argues, is to conceal contradictions and to present a falsely coherent account of how things are. Poetic discourse, I believe, can—under certain conditions, at least—address those contradictions.¹⁹

In a balance between the extremes of the 'essentialist' and 'constructivist' approaches, I assume that same-gender sexual acts, such as sodomy, took place in ancient Egypt, although the interpretation of these acts was unique to the culture; that 'homosexual' desire existed as an experience; and that some individuals, then as now, may have had a greater tendency to this desire and/or these acts. The Egyptian evidence is limited to male acts by the restricted position of women in the presentation of high culture.²⁰

I examine the way in which sexual acts were formulated in different types of discourse

¹⁴ Conveniently juxtaposed discussions: Halperin, 'Sex before Sexuality: Pederasty, Politics, and Power in Classical Athens', in Duberman et al. (eds), *Hidden from History*, 37–53; Boswell, 'Revolutions, Universals, and Sexual Categories', *ibid.* 17–36; recent summary of the controversy: B. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England* (Chicago, 1991), 3–29; recent critique of Halperin's approach: John Thorp, 'The Social Construction of Homosexuality', *Phoenix* 46 (1992), 54–61.

¹⁵ Padgug, 'Sexual Matters', 59. On the question of 'taste' see Halperin, *One Hundred Years*, 26–7. Compare Foucault, *History of Sexuality* I, 43: 'the sodomite had been [until 1870] a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species'.

¹⁶ A. Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*² (London, 1988), 16–17; Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*, 24–9, 344.

¹⁷ *One Hundred Years*, 28–9.

¹⁸ *Homosexual Desire*, in particular 17–18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 22.

²⁰ G. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1993), 176–91 and *passim*.

in the Middle Kingdom, demonstrating the distinctive decorum of literary texts with respect to this subject matter. The restriction of literacy in ancient Egypt means that all written language is in some sense 'official' discourse. Within the body of Egyptian texts, the nature of literature has been much debated, but there has been a general movement towards recognising the distinctive character and function of specifically literary discourse.²¹ Such studies suggest that Smith's remarks may be relevant to Egyptian texts: Loprieno has drawn a distinction between *topos*, articulated in commemorative and religious texts, and *mimesis*, which is a characteristic feature of 'literary' texts,²² a distinction parallel with that Smith draws between 'official' and 'poetic' discourse. The Middle Kingdom institution of 'literature' was almost certainly a less distinct mode of discourse than in Elizabethan England, since writing as a whole was less diverse and less widespread. Literature was an elite product,²³ and therefore part of 'official discourse', but there is evidence to suggest that its decorum can be distinguished from that of other forms of discourse as represented by commemorative inscriptions, or religious and ritual texts. It seems that there existed, if not a defined literary canon or an institution with exact boundaries, a category of texts which were distinctive by virtue of, among other things, their recognised fictionality. Such fictionality allowed a looser decorum, as in the *Tale of Sinuhe*, where the literary autobiography includes a freer discussion of problematic events than is attested in non-fictional autobiographies.²⁴ Many less specific examples of this can be cited, from the pessimistic view of society in the 'laments', to the fallibility of the kings in the royal Teachings, and the slightly indecorous frivolity of King Sneferu in the *Tale of King Cheops' Court*.²⁵

Non-fictional evidence

The following review examines the evidence for sexual relationships between men provided by cultural artefacts other than narrowly literary (fictional) texts, drawing on evidence from other periods to supplement the limited Middle Kingdom sources.

The funerary record shows a lack of unmarried people. Whale's survey of 93 cases from the New Kingdom provides only three examples of men whose tombs contain no evidence for a wife.²⁶ This suggests that there was a general conformity to a social ideal of the family, and reunion with one's family—including one's wife—was part of the afterlife.²⁷

²¹ E.g. J. Baines 'Interpreting Sinuhe', *JEA* 68 (1982), 31–44. See also A. Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis: zum Ausländer in der ägyptischen Literatur* (ÄA 48; Wiesbaden, 1988); idem, 'The Sign of Literature in the Shipwrecked Sailor', in U. Verhoeven and E. Graefe (eds), *Religion und Philosophie im alten Ägypten: Festgabe für Philippe Derchain zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Juli 1991* (Leuven, 1991), 209–18; idem, 'Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient Texts and Modern Literary Theory', in J. S. Cooper and G. Schwartz (eds), *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the 21st Century* (Winona Lake, in press); R. B. Parkinson, 'Teachings, Discourses and Tales from the Middle Kingdom', in S. Quirke (ed.), *Middle Kingdom Studies* (New Malden, 1991), 91–122.

²² *Topos und Mimesis, passim*.

²³ For example, C. J. Eyre, 'The Semna Stelae: Quotation, Genre and Functions of Literature', in S. Israelit-Groll (ed.), *Studies in Egyptology Presented to Miriam Lichtheim* (Jerusalem, 1990), I, 134–65.

²⁴ Baines, *JEA* 68, 33–4.

²⁵ Compare Parkinson, in Quirke (ed.), *Middle Kingdom Studies*, 101, on the 'dark' tone of much literature.

²⁶ S. Whale, *The Family in the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt: A Study of the Representation of the Family in Private Tombs* (Sydney, 1989), 244–5. As she notes, the lack of a wife in the tomb does not necessarily imply that the owner had remained unmarried throughout his life.

²⁷ In the Coffin Texts, there is a series of spells concerning the dead man's family: Spells 131, 134–6, 142–6.

Marriage is, of course, no evidence for a lack of 'homosexual' activities or inclinations,²⁸ but it is an indication of the prevailing social attitudes. Egyptian ideology gave prominence to the family (whether extended or not) and marriage. In a society where state concerns and values are formulated in terms of kinship, one can hypothesise that any sexual relationships which deviated from the family norm would provoke a hostile attitude.²⁹ The same is true of attitudes towards inherently infertile sexual acts in a society where, as Robins remarks, 'sex and fertility were inseparable',³⁰ and where begetting a son was of great importance.³¹ Art and texts show clearly distinct gender roles; there is no tradition of any 'intermediate sex' as having an established role in human society; androgyny in representations is limited to divine or royal figures who are demiurges.³² In mythology, there is an intimate union between Re and Osiris, but this is not articulated in explicitly sexual terms.³³ Social bonds and intimacy between men ('homosocialism') seem also to have been important to the state, but these are not expressed in sexual terms.³⁴

It seems that Egyptian texts provide no terms for 'sexualities' (as indeed one would expect from the work of constructivist historians); most of the relevant extant vocabulary is derived from descriptions of penetrative sexual activity rather than expressions of desire. The *locus classicus* for Middle Egyptian vocabulary is the twenty-seventh declaration in the 'Negative Confession' of the Book of the Dead, Chapter 125; in this the deceased says, 'I did not *nk* a *nk(w)*'.³⁵ The verb *nk*, 'to have penetrative sex (with)', has no particular overtones, positive or negative;³⁶ a *nk(w)* is 'a man on whom a sexual act is performed', that is a passive partner in penetrative sex, someone who is sodomised

²⁸For such acts in the context of marriage see, for example, Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*², 67–70. In Classical Athens sexual relationships between men and marriage existed together as institutions, but there is no evidence to suggest anything similar in Egypt (see below).

²⁹Boswell discusses the status of homosexuality in societies structured around extended family units, with reference to evidence from late antiquity (*Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, 31–4 and *passim*).

³⁰DE 11, 66.

³¹For example, see the Late Period stela of Padiisobek, who laments his inability to have children: M. Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies* (Freiburg, 1992), 191–201.

³²See Baines, *Fecundity Figures: Egyptian Personification and the Iconology of a Genre* (Warminster, 1985), 118 with references, in a discussion of apparently androgynous features in male fecundity figures. I know of no examples from representations of human society. Eunuchs seem to have existed, although they are rarely mentioned apart from in execration texts: G. Posener, *Cinq figurines d'envoûtement* (Cairo, 1987), 36–8; see also G. E. Kadish, in R. Anthes et al., *Studies in Honor of John A. Wilson* (Chicago, 1969), 55–62.

³³See J. van Dijk, 'The Nocturnal Wanderings of King Neferkarer', in C. Berger et al. (eds), *Hommages à Jean Leclant* (Cairo, 1994), IV, 387–93, esp. 389–91.

³⁴E. K. Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985), 1; compare Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*, 257–9 on relationships between men in medieval literature. Examples of homosocialism in Egypt include the loyalist eulogies of the 'lovableness' of the king: E. Blumenthal, *Untersuchungen zum ägyptischen Königtum des Mittleren Reiches I: Die Phraseologie* (ASAW 61/1; Berlin, 1970), 275–6 (G 1.32–5); many official titles are based on intimacy with the king (e.g. *rh-njswt*).

³⁵E. Naville, *Tb*, II, 302. The phrase is parallel to the verb *nwh*, which H. Goedicke ('Unrecognized Sportings', *JARCE* 6 (1967), 101) proposes involves oral masturbation; however, the parallelism need not imply that the verb denotes a sexual act involving another man.

³⁶J. J. Janssen, 'Two Egyptian Commandments', in J. H. Kamstra et al. (eds), *Funerary Symbols and Religion: Essays Dedicated to Professor M. S. H. G. Heerma van Voss* (Kampen, 1988), 52–9, esp. 52–5. On translating *nk*, see Eyre, 'Crime and Adultery in Ancient Egypt', *JEA* 70 (1984), 93 n. 12.

(as opposed to an active *nkww*, attested as a term of abuse from the Old Kingdom³⁷). The words seem to distinguish 'active' and 'passive' roles, terms which I use here.³⁸ *nkww* refers to an individual as the participant in an action: the prohibition is against an activity, sodomy/buggery, not a category of person, a 'homosexual' inherently characterised by an action. However, a perfective participle could denote a category: not just 'he who has heard' but a 'hearer'.³⁹ It is uncertain why the deceased should not just deny having sex with a 'male'. The same prohibition occurs in a much later local list,⁴⁰ and it may be significant that *nkww* is only attested in these contexts.

The nature and range of the statements in these texts is unclear. It is evident that sexual activity was not of itself unseemly, and the prohibitions may relate to specific contexts as well as to specific objects. Elsewhere in the 'Negative Confession' the deceased denies *nking* a *hmt-tj*, 'a married woman';⁴¹ this may suggest that sexual actions between men were regarded as the same sort of misdemeanour as adultery, and the same association occurs later (n. 40). This association is probably due to the sexual nature of both acts, and does not necessarily reflect any other comparison, such as their intrinsic ethical significance or degree of seriousness. The context of the word *nkww*, however, shows that such sexual activity was an ethical concern, rather than a 'subject for self-reflection'.⁴² Despite the possible restricted relevance of the 'Negative Confession', and although it is not attested before the Eighteenth Dynasty, it is likely that the negative attitude that it embodies was the 'official' ideal throughout pharaonic history, and that such sexual activities were considered a deviation from Maat.⁴³

This is necessarily an argument from silence. There is no certain evidence to suggest any different attitude. Three 'positive images' of such sexual actions have been proposed on the basis of representational art, but all are questionable:

- (1) The most striking is from the Old Kingdom: in the iconography of the Fifth Dynasty tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep the relationship between the two men replaces the usual relationship between the tomb-owner and his wife. This has been cited as showing a same-sex couple, although both men have wives;⁴⁴ however, the iconography is more plausibly explained as showing a pair of twins.⁴⁵

³⁷ P. Montet, *Les scènes de la vie privée dans les tombeaux égyptiens de l'ancien empire* (Strasbourg, 1925), 82; Janssen, in *Funerary Symbols and Religion*, 53.

³⁸ The distinction of roles is not invariably in these terms: see, for example, Boswell, in *Hidden from History*, 33.

³⁹ The role is defined in terms of a passive form, whereas in the Classical world grammatically active terms suggest that the act of receiving the seed, not just passivity, made it disgraceful: Boswell, in *Hidden from History*, 33.

⁴⁰ P. Montet, 'Le fruit défendu', *Kēmi* 11 (1950), 104–5, 112–13, 116.

⁴¹ Naville, *Tb.* II, 298 (19). For *hmt-tj* as a type of woman, see Goedicke, *JARCE* 6, 98–9; H.-W. Fischer-Elfert, *GM* 112 (1989), 24.

⁴² Cf. Smith, *Homosexual Desire*, 10.

⁴³ See J. Assmann, *Maat: Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im alten Ägypten* (Munich, 1990), 136–49: Chapter 125 as 'die Kodifizierung der Maat'; also Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies*, 103–44: the relationship between Chapter 125 and Middle Kingdom autobiographies.

⁴⁴ The initial report suggested several possible relationships including a 'cordial friendship' (Mounir Basta, *ASAE* 63 (1979), 47), and the tomb was included in W. Westendorf, 'Homosexualität', *LÄ* II, 1273; R. Schlichting, 'Sexualethos (-ethik)', *LÄ* V, 920; Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*, 130 (with additional references). Publication: A. Moussa and H. Altenmüller, *Das Grab des Niankhkhnum und Khnumhotep* (Mainz am Rhein, 1977), with discussion of the family pp. 25–44.

⁴⁵ Discussed by Baines, *Orientalia* 54 (1985), 461–82, esp. 463–70; this interpretation has been disputed: G. Reeder, *KMT* 4.3 (1993), 3–4.

- (2) The second example is from the Middle Kingdom, and is a faience funerary figurine which comes from a late Twelfth Dynasty tomb at Lisht.⁴⁶ The figurine is an apparently ithyphallic squatting male wearing an elaborately patterned kilt. This was interpreted by Riefstahl as representing a 'bedizened catamite', placed there for the (presumably male) tomb-owner as a male concubine figure, 'a forbidden pleasure which the Egyptian of Tomb 315 ... had enjoyed in this world or hoped to enjoy in a better world to come.'⁴⁷ Bourriau, however, has concluded that it is a conventional male figure holding an offering table; the supposed enormous phallus is the broken support of the table.⁴⁸
- (3) The third example is another possible male-male couple sanctioned by Egyptian society, from the Eighteenth Dynasty: that of king Akhenaten and 'Smenkhkare'. This sexual relationship has been suggested on the basis of the two embracing royal figures on Berlin stela 17813, but their genders are debatable.⁴⁹ Even if one assumes that both of the figures are male, it is invalid to deduce from this that the male Smenkhkare's favour under Akhenaten was due to a 'homosexual' rather than a 'homosocial' relationship. Apart from the controversial nature of the scene, the period as a whole is too exceptional for it to be used as evidence of a norm.

It is difficult to ascertain what representations were intended to evoke sexual relationships. There are representations of physically intimate relationships between men, but only as there are between members of a family, such as the Eleventh Dynasty stela showing one Amenemhat and his father embracing;⁵⁰ as Baines remarks, such motifs 'do not have a sexual meaning, as opposed to displaying socially and emotionally linked roles'.⁵¹ Such 'homosocialism' is not necessarily sexual, although it may appear so to scholars from cultures unaccustomed to asexual physical intimacy. Many social relationships can have an erotic aspect without being sexual, and the boundaries of such eroticism are difficult to define in any culture.⁵² The existence of Egyptian prohibitions against sexual acts between men suggests that the approved 'homosocial' links between men were distinct from 'homosexual' relationships. Most works of art were commissioned by and for male officials. Representations of the male physique seem, nevertheless, to embody an erotic potential; one can, for example, compare the broad-shouldered ideal of the representational canon with the desire expressed by a woman in the *Tale of the Two Brothers* for a man with strong shoulders.⁵³ In the male world of art, however, the

⁴⁶ Tomb 315, North Pyramid Cemetery, east side (now in the Brooklyn Museum): see J. Bourriau, in Quirke (ed.), *Middle Kingdom Studies*, 17.

⁴⁷ E. Riefstahl, 'An Enigmatic Faience Figure', *Miscellanea Wilbouriana*, I (1972), 137-43; quote from p. 143.

⁴⁸ In Quirke (ed.), *Middle Kingdom Studies*, 17 n. 85. Another problematic statuette, apparently from a burial, was published by G. Daressy, *ASAE* 2 (1901), 234-5, pl. 2. It was excavated from a Late Period context at Sa el-Hagar (Sais) and it seems to show a reclining bearded Syrian holding a smaller reclining male(?) by the hand; Daressy considered that this represented 'une scène d'orgie entre Syriens'.

⁴⁹ J. R. Harris, *Acta Orientalia* 35 (1973), 5-13, argued against 'homosexual fantasies' (p. 9) of identifying both figures as male. See further S. Tawfik, *MDAIK* 31 (1975), 159-61, who reaffirmed the possibility that both figures are male. A recent review of the Smenkhkare controversy in general is: J. P. Allen, 'Nefertiti and Smenkh-ka-re', *GM* 141 (1994), 7-17.

⁵⁰ Cairo JE 45626: M. Saleh and H. Sourouzzian, *The Egyptian Museum Cairo: Official Catalogue* (Mainz am Rhein, 1987), no. 79.

⁵¹ *Orientalia* 54, 467.

⁵² See Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 1-5. For Egyptian examples see n. 34.

⁵³ *LESt*, 12 (3.4-6).

portrayal of men as desirable and of gods as potent is not necessarily homoerotic. The lack of any male equivalent for specifically erotic female motifs such as the naked adolescent girl in the New Kingdom is significant in this context.⁵⁴ Representational art's coded references to sexual acts seem to concern pairings of men and women exclusively.

References to sexual activity between men in commemorative and religious texts from the Middle Kingdom are few. No direct description of such an act has been identified in commemorative inscriptions. A Heracleopolitan Period autobiography of one Khety from Abydos contains a phrase which Goedicke has interpreted as a denial of 'homosexuality':

n-ḥb(=j)-mrt-nds [...] (l. x + 8).
I did not wish the love of a youth.⁵⁵

Fischer-Elfert, however, proposes an alternative rendering which is more probable in the context of the surrounding verses:

Nicht habe ich mein Begehren auf eine verheiratete Frau gerichtet,
Nicht habe ich die Geliebte eines Bürgers begehrt.⁵⁶

In the Coffin Texts it is clear that sexual activity (*nk*) was one of the expected things in the afterlife,⁵⁷ but often no specific partner/object is mentioned, although Spell 619 refers to '*nking with (m) my wife*' (CT VI, 234a). Such activity was not just a source of pleasure and potency, but was also evoked as a source of rebirth;⁵⁸ in this context sexual activity was implicitly heterosexual. Spell 576, for example, gives a man the power to '*nk in this land day and night*' (CT VI, 191l), and the next clause takes it for granted that the implied object was a woman: 'and the desire of the woman beneath him will come each time he *nks*' (CT VI, 191m-n). Same-gender sex is mentioned in the Coffin Texts, in Spell 635, where the deceased claims that:

Re has no power over N.
[It is N] who takes away his breath.
Atem has no power over N.
N *nks* his backside (*crt*) (CT VI, 258f-g).⁵⁹

The passage suggests that sodomy is a demonstration of power over someone, and is not a matter of desire. Despite the context of the deceased entering the afterlife, the act has nothing to do with initiation, as it has in many cultures where sexual contact between a mature man and a youth can mark the latter's transition from childhood to manhood.⁶⁰ There is another reference in Spell 700, but the context is obscure.⁶¹

⁵⁴Robins, 'Some Images of Women in New Kingdom Art and Literature', in B. Lesko (ed.) *Women's Earliest Records: From Ancient Egypt and Western Asia* (Atlanta, 1989), 104–16 esp. 108–9; idem, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 180–6.

⁵⁵JARCE 6, 102. Original publication: W. M. F. Petrie, *Abydos*, III (London, 1904), pl. xxix.1.

⁵⁶GM 112, 24.

⁵⁷For the non-negative sense of *nk*, see Janssen, in Kamstra et al. (eds), *Funerary Symbols*, 52–5.

⁵⁸On possible erotic aspects of funerary scenes, see Robins, 'Problems in Interpreting Egyptian Art', *DE* 17 (1990), 45–58.

⁵⁹From two coffins from Saqqara (one belonging to a woman), dated by H. Willems to 'the time of Amenemhat II or later': *Chests of Life: A Study of the Typology and Conceptual Development of Middle Kingdom Standard Class Coffins* (Leiden, 1988), 106.

⁶⁰H. Brunner, *Altägyptische Erziehung* (Wiesbaden, 1991), 21.

⁶¹In a passage talking of Geb honouring the dead man: CT VI, 333h 'his phallus is between the buttocks of his son and his heir'. I suggest that the son is Geb's, and the phallus belongs to the dead man, and that

For the implications of this act one must draw on evidence from other periods. Sodomy features in the Pyramid Texts, where it is an injury that Horus and Seth inflict on each other:

Horus has insinuated (*nꜥ*) his semen into the backside (*ꜥrt*) of Setekh;
Setekh has insinuated his semen into the backside of Horus.⁶²

A similar injury is described in detail in the Late Egyptian *Contendings of Horus and Seth*,⁶³ where Seth attempts to sodomise Horus after a peaceful banquet, and then claims to have done on him the 'work of a male' or 'warrior' (*kꜣt-ḥꜣwtj*: 12.3).⁶⁴ The gods, when they hear, 'cried aloud and spat out before Horus' (12.4). The description suggests that this act, although enforced during a 'holiday', concerns aggression and the infliction of ignominy. This ignominy is also in part to do with impregnating an opponent with semen as a poison,⁶⁵ and the subsequent manipulations with the ejaculate have to do with the theft of virility.⁶⁶ The youth of the victim, Horus, is mobilised as a sign of the victim's (physical) weakness ('paedophilia' does not seem to be relevant here). It has been suggested that a similar mythical incident may be attested in the Ramesside calendar preserved in P. Sallier IV and P. Cairo 86637 (second month of Akhet, day 5),⁶⁷ but this passage is to be interpreted otherwise.⁶⁸ In general, the sexual act between men is presented as aggression, and as baleful.

From the detailed account in the *Contendings of Horus and Seth*, it seems that the 'passive' role of receiving the seed was disgraceful, but no stigma seems to be attached to the active role, even though the declarations of the Book of the Dead imply that it was prohibited. Halperin has noted similar variations in non-violent sexual acts in Classical Athens, suggesting that such acts were 'non-relational' manifestations of social roles, informed by an 'ethos of phallic penetration as domination'.⁶⁹ The inclusion of sodomy

the act has a similar function to that in Spell 635. (Other passages noted by Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*, 129 n. 21, are not relevant.)

⁶²J. Leclant, 'Les textes de la pyramide de Pépi I^{er} (Saqqara): reconstitution de la paroi est de l'antechambre', *CRAIBL* 1977, 277–9, col. 30. It is unlikely to have been an 'act of reconciliation' as Borghouts suggests ('Monthu and Matrimonial Squabbles', *RdE* 33 (1981), 20 n. 71); see also Baines, 'Egyptian Myth and Discourse: Myth, Gods, and the Early Written and Iconographic Record', *JNES* 50 (1991), 94–5; W. Barta, 'Zur Reziprozität der homosexuellen Beziehung zwischen Horus und Seth', *GM* 129 (1992), 33–4. Another proposed reference to such acts in the Pyramid Texts §§651a–652a has been dismissed by J. G. Griffiths, *The Conflict of Horus and Seth from Egyptian and Classical Sources* (Liverpool, 1960), 41–2.

⁶³The incident may also be alluded to in magical texts; W. Westendorf, 'Ein neuer Fall der "homosexuellen Episode" zwischen Horus und Seth? (pLeiden 348 Nr.4)', *GM* 97 (1987), 71–7; other allusions, Barta, *GM* 129, 37–8.

⁶⁴*LESt*, 53. *ḥꜣwtj* is probably just 'male' (not 'warrior': a similar phrase occurs in the *Tale of the Two Brothers* in a context where warriorship is irrelevant (*rh n-ḥꜣwtj* (3.6): *LESt*, 12). From what follows the gods expect Seth's semen to 'come out' of Horus' body, showing that anal penetration is meant.

⁶⁵Summary in Westendorf, *LÄ* II, 1272. This may be evoked in the Pyramid Text cited above, where sodomy is associated with a 'serpent': Leclant, *CRAIBL* 1977, 279.

⁶⁶Note Isis' horror in *Horus and Seth* when she sees the semen on Horus' hand (11.6–7: *LESt*, 52). The homosexual episode in general is discussed by Griffiths, *Conflict of Horus and Seth*, 41–6; H. te Velde, *Seth, God of Confusion*² (Leiden, 1977), 37–41.

⁶⁷Posener, *ZÄS* 96 (1969), 33 n. 26; E. Brunner-Traut, *Antaios* 12/4 (1970), 337–8. Read thus, however, the passage may concern adultery rather than sodomy: Borghouts, *RdE* 33, 19–21.

⁶⁸See now C. Leitz, *Tagewählerei: Das Buch ḥꜣt nhꜣ ph.wy ḏt und verwandte Texte* (Wiesbaden 1994), 67–71.

⁶⁹Halperin, *One Hundred Years*, 29–38 (quotation from p. 35); for examples from a range of cultures, see Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*, 149, 156–8, 176, 249.

in narratives about the gods is not a sign of approval of sexual relationships between men; denigration connected with sodomy can occur in ideologies that are generally intolerant of male–male sexual relationships.⁷⁰

The episode in the *Contendings of Horus and Seth* is not naturalistic, but there is a possible reference to an actual instance of male–male rape in the Turin Indictment Papyrus. One entry in a list of misdeeds reads: ‘charge concerning the violation (*hꜣ*) done by this sailor Panakhtta [... to(?) ...], a field-labourer of the estate of Khnum, lord of Elephantine’ (verso 3.4–5; *RAD* 81.16–82.1). Parallels in modern times also raise the possibility that such acts were carried out to inflict ignominy in real life. Griffiths refers to an incident at Sesebi in 1936–7; Hornblower cites a ceremonial parallel from 1895: ‘At the Mulid el Far, an annual festival in Cairo held on the birthday of the Sheikh of that name, round his mosque, a public representation was given on a cart of the act of pederasty.’⁷¹ These suggest that such defilement attested in religious texts did take place in real life as acts of illegal aggression, and in some circumstances could be a publicly sanctioned practice.

Whatever the actuality of this practice, sexual denigration was part of official discourse in the Middle Kingdom. In the boundary stela text of Senwosret III attested at Semna and Uronarti, the word *hmjw* (*Wb.* III, 80.7) occurs. It is apparently derived from *hm*, ‘to retreat’ (*Wb.* III, 79.1–21), but the phallus determinative shows that the word had a sexual aspect,⁷² and it is later synonymous with *nkk(w)* in taboos.⁷³ Presumably to ‘turn the back’ is tantamount to allowing oneself to be buggered. The term is used as if denoting a category of Egyptians characterised by their ‘cowardly’ temperament, similar to vile foreigners:

Aggression is bravery;
retreat (*hꜣ*) is vile.

He who is driven from this boundary is a true *hmjw*. (ll. 8–9)⁷⁴

A later word with the same meaning and the same determinative is used as a derogatory term for enemies including Seth: *hmtj* (*Wb.* III, 80.8–11). The *t* is derived from the nominal ending, not from *hmt*, ‘woman’.⁷⁵ Some punning association between *hmjw* and *hmt* may, however, have been made during the Middle Kingdom: in the early Twelfth Dynasty *Teaching of King Amenemhat I*, the assassinated king says that if he had been able to take arms against his bodyguard when they attacked him:

I would have made the *hmjw* retreat (*hꜣ*) with a charge. (ed. Helck, 7d).

⁷⁰A modern example of this apparent ambivalent (i.e. self-contradictory) attitude towards sodomy is provided by J. Goldberg, *Sodomities: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford, 1992), 1–5.

⁷¹Griffiths, *The Conflict of Horus and Seth*, 44 (compare A. H. Gardiner, *The Library of A. Chester Beatty ... The Chester Beatty Papyri, No. I* (London, 1931), 22 n. 2). G. D. Hornblower, ‘Further Notes on Phallism in Ancient Egypt’, *Man* 27 (1927), 150–3 (quotation from p. 151). For anal rape as a punishment for offenders as well as enemies see Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*, 156–7, 181, 249.

⁷²See Kadish in *Studies in Honor of John A. Wilson*, 59–60. In the stela text the two words *hmjw* and *hm*, ‘retreat’, occur in a related context (ll. 8, 10). Eyre gives an extreme translation of *hmjw* as ‘pansy’, in Israelit-Groll (ed.), *Studies Presented to Miriam Lichtheim I*, 135.

⁷³Montet, *Kémi* 11, 104.

⁷⁴A similar use and similar context occurs in the ‘Qadesh Poem’: *KRI* II, 70.1.

⁷⁵For the ‘agentive -*tj*’ see, for example, J. B. Callender, *Middle Egyptian* (Malibu, 1975), 53 (§3.6.2.4). *hmtj* is related to the word for ‘woman’ by Kadish, in *Studies in Honor of J. A. Wilson*, 59.

Although there are no directly relevant sexual connotations, the raiser of the attack is alluded to as a 'woman' (*hmt*) two stanzas later (ed. Helck, 9a). The attackers may be *hmjw* because they were incited to rebel by a woman; such subordination to a woman might be enough to indicate that they were not true men.

As a term of abuse, *hmjw* was probably not restricted to a ritual or royal level. In Old Kingdom tomb scenes squabbling harvesters abusively refer to their companions or rivals as *hmjw*, in contrast to the word *tj*, 'male', 'lad'.⁷⁶ This is the earliest attestation of the word *hmjw*. As invective, *hmjw* characterises an individual as the type who might end up in a passive role, but not necessarily his conscious sexual orientation and desire. It belongs to a constellation of ideas linking weakness, defeat and sexual passivity.

Neither *nkkw* or *hmjw* denotes a type of person characterised by their sexuality, but by their role in a sexual act and by their 'back-turning' temperament. There is no evidence to suggest that Egyptian sexual typology differed from those of other cultures, which, according to Halperin, 'generally derived their criteria for categorizing people not from sex but from gender: they tended to construe sexual desire as normative or deviant according to whether it impelled social actors to conform or to violate their conventionally defined gender role.'⁷⁷ The only references to same gender sexual activities in the artefacts and non-literary texts of the Middle Kingdom present the act as one of denigrating the passive partner, and a sign of the mastery of the active partner, who does not step outside his gender role. In these terms, the passive role is irregular; in later times the term *hmtj* was used of the god Seth. The active role, however, is also associated (though not exclusively) with him in mythology, which suggests that it was also potentially disorderly; in later sources the god is associated with disruptive and anarchic (if potent) desire for various objects.⁷⁸

The extant evidence does not hint at any general view of the perpetrator's sexual psychology. The association of the acts with Seth suggests that irregular sexual acts could be viewed as a symptom of a 'typhonian' temperament that was characterised by excessive and unregulated appetite.⁷⁹ A fragmentary passage in the New Kingdom 'Dream Book' describes the signs of people for whom the diagnosis is 'the god in him is Seth' (e.g. 11.3).⁸⁰ Symptoms include the fact that such a man 'is beloved of women through the greatness [...] {the greatness} of his loving (*mrw*) them' (11.7–8), aggression (11.11), and that 'he will not distinguish the married woman from [an unmarried one(?)]' (11.13). A broken line in the same passage includes a 'lone man, gre[at(?) ...]' (*wr ʿ3* [...], 11.2), which Gardiner suggested referred to an 'unmarried' man.⁸¹ It is, however, more likely to mean someone who is anti-social in general, rather than anything specifically sexual.⁸² The predominance of married couples among tomb representations (p. 60 above)

⁷⁶ Montet, *Les scènes de la vie privée*, 203–4. Another term of abuse with a sexual edge is *nk(w)*, 'you copulator' (ibid. 82).

⁷⁷ Halperin, *One Hundred Years*, 25.

⁷⁸ Te Velde, *Seth*, 55–6; see above.

⁷⁹ A supposed association between debauchery and sodomy is attested in other cultures: see, for example, Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*², 16.

⁸⁰ Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri. Third Series* I, 20–1; II, pl. 8–8a. On the New Kingdom date of the composition, see S. Israelit-Groll, in id., *Pharaonic Egypt, the Bible and Christianity* (Jerusalem, 1985), 71–118.

⁸¹ *Hieratic Papyri: Third Series*, I, 20 n. 3, 21.

⁸² As in, for example, the *Loyalist Teaching*, §10.4–9: G. Posener, *L'enseignement loyaliste: sagesse égyptienne du Moyen Empire* (Geneva, 1976), 38–41, 118–21.

suggests, nonetheless, that remaining unmarried would be viewed as a sign of such anti-social temperament.

While sexual activity between men is accommodated in official discourse, it is not articulated in erotic terms; it is presented in less erotic terms than non-sexual 'homosexual' relationships. 'Homosexual' *desire/love* is marginalised in official discourse, to the point that one might imagine its existence was never articulated.

Literary evidence

Three passages in extant Middle Kingdom literary texts refer directly to sexual acts between men; one is part of a teaching, and the other two are from tales. There is a strikingly large number of attestations as only around forty literary texts are known from the period, and in Middle Kingdom literature, sexual acts of any sort play a rather minor part.

(1) *The Teaching of the Vizier Ptahhotep*

The date of this Teaching has been much discussed, and an attribution to the Twelfth Dynasty is not universally accepted.⁸³ Here it is sufficient to note that, even if it were composed earlier, it was certainly part of the Middle Kingdom literary canon. Teachings are by their nature the most idealising and 'topical' of literary genres (the closest to Smith's 'official' discourse: see n. 19), but they are placed in a fictional frame.⁸⁴ In any case, *Ptahhotep* displays an awareness of the imperfections of individual life, most obviously in the description of old age afflicting even a virtuous man.⁸⁵ Teachings do not embody the virtues of an ideal life as simply as 'official' autobiographies, and they dwell more extensively on possible dangers and failings.

The thirty-second maxim of *Ptahhotep* (vv. 457–62) in the version of P. Prisse reads:

jm = K-NK-HMT-HRD rḥ.n = k-ḥsfwt

r-mw ḥr-ḥtj = f

*nn-qb n-ntt-m-ḥt = f*⁸⁶

jm = f-swhw r-jrt-ḥsfwt

qb = f m-ḥt-ḥd = f-jb = f

May you not have sex with a woman-boy, for you know⁸⁷ that what is opposed will be water upon his breast.

There is no coolness (i.e. relief) for what is in his belly (i.e. his appetite).

Let him not spend the night doing what is opposed;

he shall be cool after destroying (i.e. renouncing) his desire.⁸⁸

⁸³ See, for example, Parkinson, in Quirke (ed.), *Middle Kingdom Studies*, 103, 106–7 (with bibliography).

⁸⁴ See Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, 14–16.

⁸⁵ vv. 8–27. Compare the remarks of Loprieno on the 'mimetic' aspects of *Ptahhotep*, in *Topos und Mimesis*, 88 n. 18.

⁸⁶ Goedicke's interpretation (see n. 89 here) relies on reading *ntj* (101, n. 38); *ntt* is, if anything, more likely.

⁸⁷ An alternative rendering is: 'a woman-boy whom you know, /for what is opposed ...' This would produce a more regular division into verses, although the rubric ends after *hrd*, and 'know' is rarely used in this way in *Ptahhotep*. However, in v. 501 a fat woman is 'known to her town'.

⁸⁸ The text of L1 is fragmentary but substantially the same: the third verse of P. Prisse is omitted, but an apparently equivalent verse is inserted after the following one: *nn-gr = f hr-...*: 'He shall not be quiet because of [...]' ; one can perhaps restore '[what is in his belly]'. In L1, the final verse reads *qbb = f m-ḥt-ḥd. [n = f (?)]-jb*: 'after he has destroyed his desire, he is cool'.

I disagree with the reading advanced by Goedicke, which suggests that the maxim condemns sodomy while condoning oral sex between men.⁸⁹ As I understand the passage, Ptahhotep argues that the nocturnal activities of the 'woman-boy' cannot bring the relief for his desire; the imagery of 'coolness' (*qb*) recalls the erotic relief (*qb*) found by Sneferu in watching fair maidens rowing in the *Tale of King Cheops' Court*.⁹⁰ 'Water upon his breast' seems to be a related image for the relief he desires.⁹¹ For true relief, however, the boy must renounce his desire. There is a possible ambiguity in the final phrase, as *jb*, 'desire', can also be 'conscience': 'destroying the heart' is the opposite of 'following the heart', which is recommended in an earlier maxim.⁹² Such ambiguity (if deliberate) may give a sense of the boy's moral confusion, but does not alter the general thrust of the maxim.

The maxim's implications can be teased out a little further. Sexual acts have a strong ethical aspect, although in *Ptahhotep* types of character are designated by speech and appetite, not by any sexual details. This maxim seems to belong with a group concerning antisocial desire or appetite, such as adultery. The person who is *nked* is clearly a young male,⁹³ but is referred to as having woman's characteristics, of adopting another gender role (i.e. 'effeminate').⁹⁴ His actual social role is uncertain. He is not an unwilling victim of pederasty, but youth may be relevant as making it easier for him to adopt the feminine role in the eyes of the active partner.⁹⁵ He may be implicitly a boy-prostitute; there are parallels for boys acting as outlets of ('heterosexual'/'normal') male desire which could otherwise disrupt marriage and family honour.⁹⁶

The passive role is 'what is opposed' (in accordance with the attitudes exemplified by the mythical incidents cited above): *hsfwt* implies something perverse and punishable.⁹⁷ The maxim makes no reference at all to the active role. Although it is prohibited, it is as if the active partner is not demeaned; he is not departing from his appropriate role, and the imaginary audience/pupil is elsewhere assumed to be intending to marry (e.g. the twenty-first and thirty-seventh maxims, vv. 325–38, 499–506). The object on which the

⁸⁹ *JARCE* 6, 97–102. On his interpretation, the maxim is 'an admonition to abstain from making pederastic advances after meeting objections to the less serious homosexual sports' (p. 101). After Goedicke, the translation would be something like: 'You shall not *nk* a vulva-boy, after you have learnt of (his) objections concerning semen from the glans of his penis. There is no calming one who is in his bowels; let him (the boy) not (have to) spend the night making objections; he (the seducer) will be calm (only) after he has destroyed his wish.' This seems to me strained, and relies on idioms proposed without supporting parallels.

⁹⁰ P. Westcar 5.3–4: A. M. Blackman (ed. W. V. Davies), *The Story of King Kheops and the Magicians: Transcribed from Papyrus Westcar, Berlin Papyrus 3033* (Reading, 1988), 5.

⁹¹ Compare Z. Žába, *Les maximes de Ptahhotep* (Prague, 1956), 156 (v. 458).

⁹² In the 'Intef Harper's song' this is an undesirable action: Leiden K.6: *m-hd-jb = k*, 'Do not destroy your heart': M. V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison, 1985), 380 (= P. Harris 500 6.12).

⁹³ Goedicke *JARCE* 6, 100 on equivalence to 'Buhlknabe'. The use of *hrd* for mature males is discussed by D. Franke, *Altägyptische Verwandtschaftsbezeichnungen im Mittleren Reich* (Hamburg, 1983), 304–8; these are contextual metaphorical extensions of the usual sense of the term.

⁹⁴ The term is 'intermediate' enough to have led some critics (surveyed by Goedicke, *JARCE* 6, 97–8) to translate as a 'young girl', despite the masculine suffixes in following lines. Note the possible ambiguity with the term *hmt-tj*, 'married woman'.

⁹⁵ In many cultures, women and boys can often be interchangeable as objects of sexual activity: e.g. Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*, 143–5, 175.

⁹⁶ For example, Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*², 78; Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*, 157 (quoting Plautus, *Cucurlio*, 35–8).

⁹⁷ Žába, *Les maximes de Ptahhotep*, 156 (v. 458). A similar phrase in the *Tale of Eloquent Peasant*, ed. R. B. Parkinson (Oxford, 1991) B1 178, B2 94, where *jr-hsf* means 'to deal punishment'.

pupil's virility is exercised seems irrelevant for his own morality (or sexuality), and the aim of the prohibition is to safeguard the morality of the passive partner. This contrasts with the eighteenth maxim, where the dangers of adultery are presented in terms of the active perpetrator (vv. 277–97), perhaps because adultery was more disruptive socially than an occasional act of sodomy. The boy is described as desiring sex by temperament, in contrast to other descriptions of the passive role, in which it is an unwanted result of weakness.

In terms of literary context, the act is clearly not an 'unspeakable vice', because it features in a stately teaching which is set in the Old Kingdom and is imagined as being recited at the king's command (vv. 36–41). Nevertheless, the concentration of the description on the passive role may embody a reticence about the active role.

(2) *The Tale of Horus and Seth*

This tale is preserved on a late Twelfth Dynasty fragment from el-Lahun, and comprises a sexual incident similar to that attested in the Late Egyptian tale.⁹⁸ The status of this text as literature is problematic, and Assmann has suggested that it is not a mythical narrative—which would perhaps be literature—but possibly part of a magical text.⁹⁹ The style, however, is that of a literary narrative, and the relationship between magical/religious and literary texts can be very close.

The incident was originally part of a longer composition; the change from horizontal lines to vertical at the end of the preserved fragment suggests that it may have been towards the end of the copy.¹⁰⁰ The first page is destroyed apart from line ends, but enough survives to show that it contained dialogue. The preserved incident occupies ll. x + 1.8 onwards:

And then the Person of Seth said
to the Person of Horus: 'How lovely is your backside!
Broad (*wsh?*) are [your] thighs [.....]' (x + 1.8–x + 2.1)

Seth's overtures to the act suggest lust rather than a trick to enforce power, as in the Late Egyptian *Contendings of Horus and Seth*. Here the act seems to be desired by the active partner, and is inspired by physical attraction. The 'chat-up line' (*nfr.wj-phwj = kj*: x + 2.1) is apparently a parody of *nfr.wj-hr = k*, 'How fair is your face!', attested as a ritual greeting,¹⁰¹ and this probably marks the overture as ridiculous and irregular by replacing 'face' with 'backside'.¹⁰² The second verse of Seth's speech is of uncertain reading; it may

⁹⁸ P. Kahun VI.12: F. Ll. Griffith, *Hieratic Papyri from Kahun and Gurob* (London, 1898) II, pl. 3.

⁹⁹ References in Parkinson, in Quirke (ed.) *Middle Kingdom Studies*, 119–20; on the question of 'myth' see Baines, *JNES* 50, 81–105, esp. 99. Other references to such an incident occur in magical and ritual texts: Griffiths, *Horus and Seth*, 44–5; Barta, *GM* 129, 37–8.

¹⁰⁰ Compare the arrangement of the *Eloquent Peasant* on P. Berlin 3023: Parkinson, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* (Oxford, 1991), xv–xvii.

¹⁰¹ For example, Pyramid Text Spell 220, §195; the hymns of P. Chester Beatty IV, where *nfr.wj-* acts as a refrain (9.12–13; 10.1; 11.8, 10, 12, 13, 15; 12.4, 6). The phrase also occurs in a light-hearted context in *Fishing and Fowling* B 1.6 (R. A. Caminos, *Literary Fragments in the Hieratic Script* (Oxford, 1956), pl. 2).

¹⁰² The 'backside' is praised in a love song of P. Chester Beatty I, where the beloved woman is 'loose of backside (*bdš-phṯ*)' (C. 1.5: Fox, *Song of Songs*, 56 n. f; 393 l. 13).

be a parody of the autobiographical epithet 'broad of strides' (*wshy-nmtwt*).¹⁰³ The language is noticeably less direct than in *Ptahhotep*.

Horus' response suggests that the act is a disreputable one that Seth would wish to keep secret:

And the Person of Horus said:

'Watch out; I shall tell [this]!' (x + 2.2)¹⁰⁴

He describes the act to his mother Isis as:

['...'] Seth [sought] to have carnal knowledge (*rḥ*) of me.'

And she said to him: 'Beware! Do not approach him about it!

When he mentions it to you another time, then you shall say to him:

"It is too painful (*qns*) for me entirely, as you are heavier (*dns*) than me.

My strength (*phṯj*) shall not match/support (*rmn*) your strength (*phṯj*)", so you shall say to him.' (x + 2.3–6)

phṯj is male sexual strength,¹⁰⁵ and seems to be seed or the virile member to judge from the following line. The final verse of the excuse is structured by word play between 'backside' (*phwṯj*) and 'potency', implying that 'my backside will not support your potency'. Horus is advised to use his youthful weakness as an excuse, and the excuse refers to the act as a contest in strength. This reverses the usual connotation of sodomy as a means of domination: if Seth were acting in a regular manner, the fact that the act will overpower Horus should be for him an argument for it rather than against it. After suggesting this excuse, Isis (presumably assuming that Seth will persist) advises Horus to pretend to submit but to avoid penetration. From their remarks, the sexual act is viewed by Horus and Isis as a humiliation of a weaker rival,¹⁰⁶ involving contamination by the semen (x + 2.9). From the final extant lines, it seems likely that Seth's ejaculate would have been taken and used by Isis against him (as in the Late Egyptian tale). The fragment ends as Seth summons Horus to him once again.

Seth will take enjoyment from sex with another male (it will be 'sweet to his heart', x + 2.6–8). His active desire is summoned by a physique that is markedly male (the pun links the 'backside' in question with the very male force of 'strength'—see n. 105). The context of the mythical events and Seth's character suggest that this is intended to be a negative portrayal of male (active) desire for another male. Any such desire is absent from allusions in official texts to very similar acts, where they are limited to unerotic denigration.

(3) *The Tale of King Neferkare and the Military Commander Saset*

This tale is known from three fragmentary copies spanning the Nineteenth to Twenty-fifth Dynasties;¹⁰⁷ it was composed before the Nineteenth Dynasty, and linguistic

¹⁰³ J. M. A. Janssen *De traditioneele egyptische autobiografie voor het Nieuwe Rijk* (Leiden, 1946) II, 17–18 (T.3–5, 7).

¹⁰⁴ Compare the threat made by the maidservant in the *Tale of King Cheops' Court* to reveal the secret birth of the future kings: 'I will go and tell this!' (12.12: Blackman, *The Story of King Kheops*, 16).

¹⁰⁵ See the discussion of te Velde, *Seth*², 38.

¹⁰⁶ It is perhaps significant that the literary passage which embodies the sexual act in a manner closest to 'official discourse' is the one whose status as literature is the most debatable.

¹⁰⁷ Posener, 'Le Conte de Néferkaré et du Général Siséné (Recherches littéraires iv)', *RdE* 11 (1957), 119–37.

features, prosopography and style led Posener to date it to the end of the Middle Kingdom.¹⁰⁸ Stylistically, it is closer to the *Tale of King Cheops' Court* than to the more elevated tales of the Middle Kingdom such as *Sinuhe* or the *Shipwrecked Sailor*. This may be explained as the result of a later date of composition, or of its belonging to a different level of the literary canon. Nevertheless, it will still have been an elite composition, and was clearly an established part of written culture, having a very long reading history.

Two writing tablets preserve the start of the tale with mention of a King Neferkare and his military commander Saset, suggesting that they were probably two central characters of the whole. The fragmentary passage contains the word 'desire' (*mrwt*: T OIC 13539 l. 3).¹⁰⁹ The remaining fragments are from P. Chassinat I, on three pages, the first of which is all but completely lost (and it is impossible to determine how far it is from the start of the text). The second and third episodes are on consecutive pages. The third page concerns the nocturnal encounters between the king and his military commander, in which the king is noticed:

going out at night

all alone, with nobody with him. (P. Chassinat I x + 3.x + 2–3)

He surreptitiously enters the house of the military commander and spends four hours there, and then:

after his Person had done what he desired with him (*jrj-mr(t) = f-hr = f*)

he returned to his place. (x + 3.x + 9)

This 'desire' is clearly sexual, and the king implicitly takes the active role; it is not an action 'against' (*r*) the military commander. The sexual act is alluded to decorously rather than being described as in other literary texts. The phrase 'doing what he desired' occurs in descriptions of the union of the god and queen accompanying the Eighteenth Dynasty representations of the 'Birth Cycle',¹¹⁰ and the passage may possibly be a parodic allusion to earlier formulations of this context that have not survived, or to similarly decorous unions. Other elements of parody can be detected: the nighttime is divided into three sections each of four hours (x + 3.x + 11–13), and this division may be an allusion to the mythical union of Re and Osiris that occurred in this central portion of the night.¹¹¹ The choice by the author of a 'military commander' as the king's lover may also be relevant in this context; the rank may relate to the sanctioned context of such sexual acts as the denigration of enemies, and constitute another parodic allusion to the normal state of affairs.¹¹²

The liaison constitutes deeply scandalous behaviour,¹¹³ as is seen from the facts that the king is obliged to act with great secrecy, and his nocturnal trips are already the object

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 132–3.

¹⁰⁹ A speculative restoration is given in Parkinson, *Voices from Ancient Egypt* (London, 1991), 55: 'Now the Patrician and [Count]... [... knew of (?)] the love [of the king]/[for] General Saset'.

¹¹⁰ Posener, *RdE* 11, 130–1 n. 9.

¹¹¹ Van Dijk, in Berger et al. (eds), *Hommages à Jean Leclant*, 389–91. The union of the gods is never described in sexual terms, and so can be considered metasexual; the primordial and androgynous nature of the god also prevents any 'homosexual' aspect.

¹¹² Although differences in rank and military rank in general have been regarded as erotic stimuli later in homosexual history, these modern associations are presumably irrelevant here.

¹¹³ This disagrees with Goedicke's suggestion that 'homosexual relations were not considered morally wrong as long as they were based on mutual consent' (*JARCE* 6, 102).

of rumour ($x + 3.x + 4-5$), and shocking enough to warrant a man's following the king 'without misgiving' ($x + 3.x + 5-6$). The king's visits are described as an established 'nightly' and presumably regular practice (P. Chassinat I, $x + 3.x + 14$).

The previous page of the tale preserves the immediately preceding incident, in which an individual called the 'petitioner of Memphis' attempts to speak before the court, but is drowned out by the noise of the court musicians (P. Chassinat I, $x + 2.x + 7-14$). The mention of the king and the military commander in this scene suggests that they were involved in frustrating his appeal.¹¹⁴ One possibility is that the petitioner's speech may have involved a protest against the royal affair, and that he may have been the source of the rumour of the affair that is mentioned a page later. If so, his attitude will have offered a model for the audience's response, and have added a moralistic dimension to the treatment of the subject. Nevertheless, the episode will also probably have been a source of salacious enjoyment, similar to episodes of adultery and voyeurism in the *Tale of King Cheops' Court*.¹¹⁵

When the military commander is mentioned at the start of the tale, his name is followed by the phrase: *jw-nn-wn-st-hmt m* [...], 'there was no wife'¹¹⁶ [...] (T OIC 13539 ll. 3-4), probably to be restored either *m*[-*r*=*f*], 'wi[th him]',¹¹⁷ or *m*[-*pr*=*f*], 'in [his house]'. Thus, the first fact stated about Sasetet is that he is unmarried; this suggests that the lack of a wife may have been a symptom of his susceptibility to the king's overtures. It is significant that such a statement is made only about the passive partner (so far as can be told from the fragmentary text); in the absence of any statement otherwise, the audience would presumably assume that the king was married. The combination of rank and unmarried status suggest that Sasetet may have been portrayed as predominantly attracted to the same sex, although his not having a wife could be either a result of his inclinations, or a cause of them. It is generally admitted that sexual activity between men can be contextually inspired, by the lack of any female outlet for desire.¹¹⁸ If such an analysis is implied by this passage, this view would be compatible with the passage in *Ptahhotep* where the description of the woman-boy's desire suggests that it was thought of as excessive. Although the ages of the two men are not specified, both are office-holders and so are presumably mature: the king is obviously sexually mature and Sasetet has his own house.

The liaison is expressed in 'normal' terms, such as can be used of family or social relationships. The word *mrj* (T OIC 13539 l. 3, P. Chassinat I $x + 3.x + 9$) expresses 'desire' for sexual gratification, although not necessarily erotic 'love'; *mrj* is not only erotic, but also hierarchical, and is frequent in the context of family relationships.¹¹⁹ The normality of the vocabulary in the tale does not imply that the relationship is acceptable; rather, it might heighten the shock of the king's irregular behaviour, as does the description of him as 'this god' (P. Chassinat I, $x + 3.x + 5$). The liaison is a continuing relationship, and each man seems to be the sole object of desire for the other. This desire is expressed, but only to be then constrained by the narrative.

¹¹⁴ So Posener, *RdE* 11, 128 n. 11.

¹¹⁵ Cf. van Dijk, in Berger et al. (eds), *Hommages à Jean Leclant*, 392. Unlike him, I doubt the audience would have been shocked by any elements of religious parody.

¹¹⁶ For *st-hmt* as a Middle Kingdom term for 'wife', see Fischer-Elfert, *GM* 112, 24 (with refs.).

¹¹⁷ Posener, *RdE* 11, 124 n. 7.

¹¹⁸ E.g. Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*, 30-1, 283.

¹¹⁹ Summary in E. Brunner-Traut, 'Liebe', *LÄ* III, 1034-48.

The fragmentary state of the tale deprives us of a full context for the incident. Neferkare's actions in general suggest that he is to be regarded as one of the bad kings of literature,¹²⁰ similar to Cheops in the *Tale of King Cheops' Court* and to Sasebek of the Late Period tale of P. Vandier.¹²¹ It is possible that the enormity of King Neferkare may have resulted in disaster for him and his dynasty, perhaps as a result of the appeals of the petitioner of Memphis; one can compare the *Tale of King Cheops' Court* which relates how the family of the flawed King Cheops was later to be replaced by more observant, divinely-begotten kings.¹²² Posener suggested that the tale might be 'une satire des mœurs qui montre le décomposition de l'Ancien Empire à la veille de sa chute', implying that sexual relations between men were considered—as they have often been—decadent.¹²³ There is, however, no trace of such sexual acts as a sign of social decadence in the pessimistic discourses that describe the land falling into chaos.¹²⁴ The tone of the tale is not as serious as these laments, but it does imply that a sexual relationship between men was scandalous, although it was not 'unspeakable', even when it concerned the very centre of society, the king.

Conclusion

From this review, it seems that in official discourse of the Middle Kingdom sexual acts between men were expressed only insofar as they conformed to acceptable male gender roles and power-structures: that is, the defilement of enemies. The denial of an active role in the later Book of the Dead suggests that this sanctioned act was mentioned only in certain ideological contexts. In mythology, the active role is mostly associated with the ambivalent god Seth, suggesting that it had irregular overtones (especially, perhaps, if done for pleasure or if enforced). The passive role was despised as a sign of physical weakness (either due to immaturity or to general 'vileness') and of abandoning a man's proper gender role for a 'womanly' one. Cowards who occupied the defiled role were categorised with a term 'back-turner' (*hmjw*). The existence of this term suggests that some people might have been thought innately suited to such a role, but the sexual aspect is a symptom, rather than a cause or innate characteristic, of this temperament. Sexual acts between men seem to be predominantly expressions of power, and the relationships are uneroticised. 'Desire' (*mrj*) is never mentioned, in contrast to, say, the regular desire between spouses that is attested in funerary contexts.

While sexual desire between men was marginalised in other cultural artefacts, three passages suggest that it was accorded a significant role in literature. The vocabulary in these passages is compatible with that used in descriptions of erotic encounters between men and women: *nfr*, *mrj*, *jb*. *Ptahhotep* raises the possibility that men used other males

¹²⁰ Posener, *RdE* 11, 136.

¹²¹ Posener, *Le Papyrus Vandier* (Cairo, 1985), 15–16.

¹²² Cf. also J. Johnson, 'The Demotic Chronicle as a Statement of a Theory of Kingship', *JSSSEA* 13 (1983), 61–72.

¹²³ *RdE* 11, 137. It is not absolutely certain which Neferkare is meant.

¹²⁴ Goedicke has detected a reference to pederasty in the *Dialogue of a Man and Soul*, ll. 99–101 (*JARCE* 6, 101; see also idem, *The Report about the Dispute of a Man with his Ba* (Baltimore, 1970), 152–4). However, the only evidence for this interpretation is the parallelism with the preceding stanza, which relies on his interpretation of *st-hmt* as 'virgin', against which see Fischer-Elfert, *GM* 112, 24. I prefer the conventional interpretation as a reference to a child who is disowned by his father: e.g. Blackman, *JEA* 16 (1930), 71 (21).

for sexual satisfaction, without this being connected with desire or anything erotic that would alter their normal gender role. The passages also suggest that some people were considered to have by temperament a desire for 'what was opposed'; here desire for both active and passive roles seems to be acknowledged. In these descriptions, the individuals whose desire seems to be exclusively for their own sex (the 'woman-boy' and Sasetet) are significantly those who occupy the passive role. By the end of the Middle Kingdom, this repertoire included relationships between men of unequal age (which presumably plays with idea of defilement and exploitation of the weaker), and unequal rank. None is suggestive of initiatory pederasty, and there are no examples of heroic male (homosocial) friendships as a literary motif, such as that of Gilgamesh and Enkidu in Mesopotamia.¹²⁵ Relationships between two mature men were conceivable,¹²⁶ but they were disgraceful, subverting the usual male gender and social roles of husband and father. The parodic tone of two of the passages suggests that such relationships were objects of amusement as well as scandal.

The lack of any reference to 'homosexual' desire from extant official discourse is striking, when compared with the high proportion in the equally fragmentary poetic record. I suggest that this distribution can be explained by reference to two hypotheses: that such desire was considered irregular; and that the decorum of literary texts accommodated 'irregular' features of life that were excluded from formal official discourse. Sexual acts are a specific example of this latter phenomenon. The literary texts, as Smith remarks for those of a different culture (n. 19), seem to address the discrepancy between ideology and actuality directly. In particular, the *Tale of Neferkare and Sasetet* places the disorderly sexual act at the royal centre of society and ideology. This model illuminates another feature of the distribution of attestations. The motif is more common in Middle Kingdom literature than in that of the New Kingdom, when the major example (*Contentings of Horus and Seth*) is free from any mention of desire, in a manner that is compatible with the presentation of official discourse. This is particularly striking since *Neferkare and Sasetet* belongs to a style of narrative that dominates Late Egyptian literature. The apparent disappearance of the motif may be due to the accidents of preservation, but it may also reflect a change in literary decorum, as Middle Kingdom literature is arguably more preoccupied than New Kingdom literature with the less than ideal side of life.¹²⁷

Men who participated in same-gender sexual acts have a limited position in literary decorum. Although they are not given any independent voice, their presence is felt and admitted, even if it is not approved. In this, they can be compared with other ideologically censured figures, such as men engaged in adultery. One can compare this distribution with episodes of adultery: in the official record there are, not surprisingly, few traces of adultery, but there is clear evidence of its occurrence from, for example, Deir el-Medina.¹²⁸ Literature occupies an intermediate position. In fiction such as the *Tale of King Cheops' Court*, its occurrence is admitted and described in detail; the tales affirm an ethical attitude, and the adulterous wife and her lover who feature in the tale told by

¹²⁵ See, for example, Greenberg, *Construction of Homosexuality*, 110–16; Halperin, *One Hundred Years*, 75–87.

¹²⁶ This age range is more suggestive of modern 'homosexual' experiences than of the paradigm of ancient Greece.

¹²⁷ See above, n. 25. From such a change, it is, of course, impossible to draw conclusions about any change in social attitudes towards sexuality between the two periods.

¹²⁸ Eyre, *JEA* 70, 92–105; Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 67–72.

Prince Chephren in *Cheops' Court* meet with a savage destruction. Literature might admit imperfections, but it still articulates the normative attitude, mediating between the ideal and the actual. Although the use of such sources to deduce the occurrences of such acts in life is problematic, nonetheless the occurrences of adultery in literary and documentary sources suggest that such comparisons may be fruitful. As Eyre concludes, 'the literary norm in Egypt was that adultery resulted in death',¹²⁹ but 'in practice adultery usually resulted in divorce or repudiation'. Daily life will have been still less schematic than literature, and will have presented a much larger number of what Smith terms 'untidy facts' (p. 59 above). As the literary texts admit the existence of antisocial sexual activity and desire between men, it is probable that these acts and desires occurred, despite the official ideology, and more frequently than the texts offer any means of assessing. Evidence for such sexual acts is lacking from Deir el-Medina, perhaps because they were inherently more irregular than adultery (which is attested), while being less disruptive to the instituted social fabric of family and property.

Textual evidence shows that Egypt did not witness any sense of categorisation by sexuality, but that sexual acts between men were acknowledged to occur. In official discourse, these were not normally formulated in terms of sexual relationships, but rather, as the denigration of a weaker male. Active participation did not compromise a man's proper gender role. Sexual desire between men, however, was also recognised, and the low-key presentation of the relationship in the *Tale of Neferkare and Saset* implies that there were liaisons between men in elite circles, despite public disapproval. Such desire was not articulated in official public discourse, and was presumably condemned; however, it was not suppressed from all forms of cultural discourse, and was articulated in what we would now term 'literature'.

¹²⁹ JEA 70, 97–8.



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Same-Sex Desire, Conjugal Constructs, and the Tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep

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Same-sex desire, conjugal constructs, and the tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep

Greg Reeder

Abstract

Discovered in 1964, the tomb of the manicurists Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep from the Fifth Dynasty of Old Kingdom Egypt depicts the two men in intimate poses usually reserved for husband and wife. Initial archaeologies suggested the two men were close friends, but soon the idea of them as twins was being advocated to explain their 'exaggerated affection'. This paper uses recent research on conjugal figuration during the pictorially innovative Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Dynasties and internal evidence from the tomb itself to offer insight into the unique relationship between the two manicurists.

Keywords

Same-sex desire; Egypt; Fifth Dynasty Old Kingdom; Niankhkhnum; Khnumhotep.

Introduction

On 12 November 1964 Mounir Basta, the Chief Inspector of Lower Egypt, together with the chief workman, descended a ladder into the darkness of a newly cleared shaft just south of the causeway of Unas in the Necropolis of Saqqara. Holding only a kerosene lamp, they crawled on their hands and knees into a small Fifth Dynasty offering chamber (circa 2400 BC). To their excitement the walls were inscribed, but the light revealed something Basta had never seen before in any of the Saqqara tombs. There, carved in the space between two false doors, stood two men embracing one another (Plate 1). Their names and identical titles were carved above them: Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, manicurist of the king and the inspector of manicurists of the Palace.

Basta was both impressed and intrigued:

The scene is repeated on two other walls. . . . The importance of the discovery of this tomb can be connected with this unique scene. The inscriptions of the tomb do not lead us to any solution, concerning the relationship between the two deceased. Were they



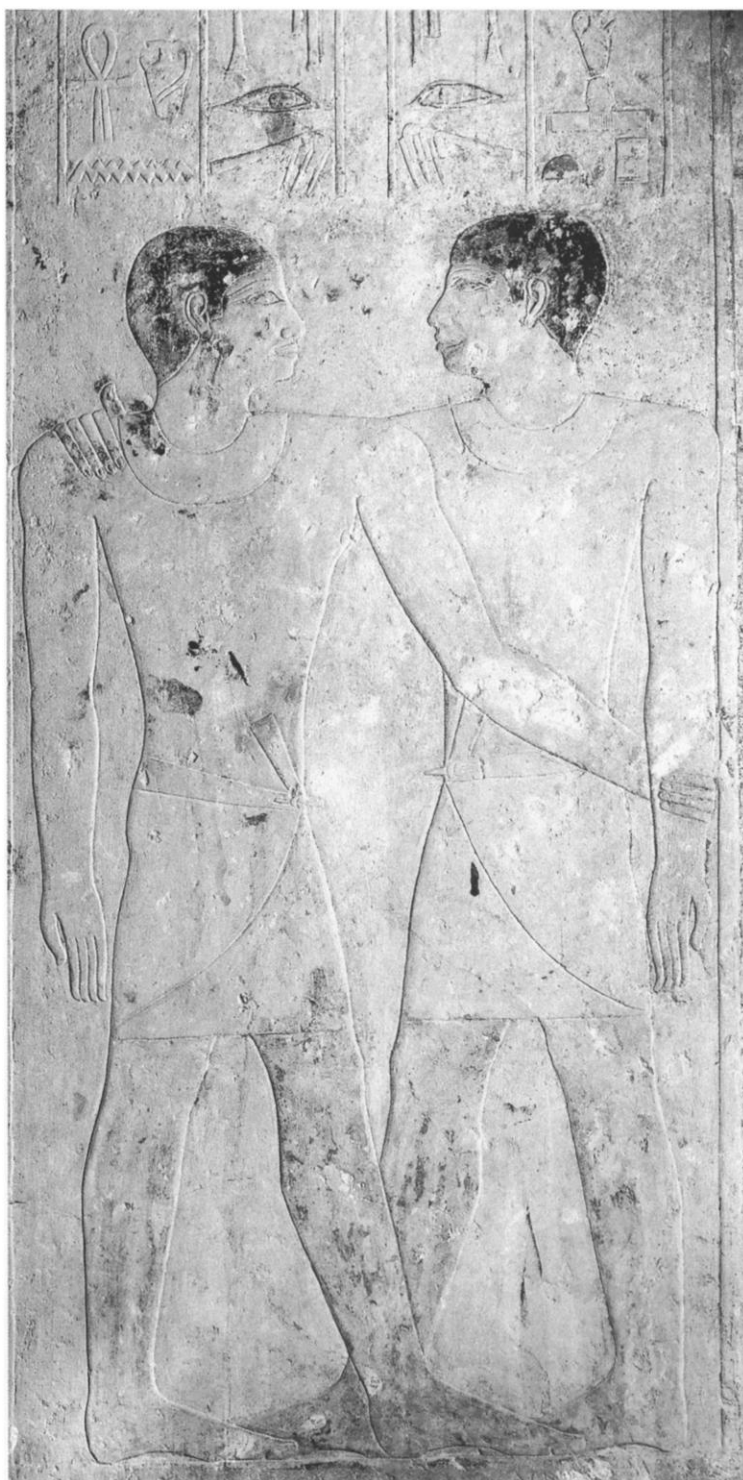


Plate 1 Detail of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep embracing between the false doors (Photo: Greg Reeder).

two brothers? Were they the father and son? Or were they two officials in the king's palace who had enjoyed a cordial friendship in life and wished to keep it after death in the nether world.

(Basta 1979: 47)

Other blocks from the tomb were soon discovered in the building material of the causeway of Unas itself. These were recovered and the mastaba and rock-cut tomb reconstructed, restored, and published (Moussa and Altenmüller 1977). The scenes of the two men embracing provided fertile grounds for speculation. Altenmüller and Moussa suggested Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep were brothers, possibly twins. It was John Baines, though, who, in his seminal study entitled 'Egyptian twins', creatively dealt with the questions raised by the 'exaggerated affection' publicly displayed by the two men by suggesting their 'twinship' necessitated the ancients viewing them as special liminal beings, dual anomalies, in need of symbolic correction to be acceptable, therefore treating the 'twins' as a single social person (Baines 1985: 480). Baines's 'twins' label has been the epithet with the most staying power.

The argument for twinship was constructed around the case of Eighteenth-Dynasty 'brothers' Suty and Hor. Their stela, now in the British Museum (BM 826), states in unusual language they are brothers (*sn*), and that 'He came forth with me from the womb on the same day' (Lichtheim 1976: 88). This inscription has been widely accepted as a reference to their 'certain twinship'. Recently, however, this 'certain twinship' has been called into question by Jean Revez in his research on the metaphorical use of the word *sn*.

The kinship term *sn*, 'brother', may metaphorically be translated either by 'friend', 'lover', 'husband', 'colleague', 'confrere' or 'coregent'. In such cases, *sn* refers to an alter ego, a person who is on an equal footing with someone else, because both share the same values or hold the same power. The relationship which binds a *sn* 'brother' to another, is therefore one of complementarity.

(Revez 1997)

Consequently, Revez proposed the possibility that the language used by Suty and Hor on their stela to describe their 'twinship' was, in fact, metaphorical.

Whether Hor and Suty were 'what appears to be the only unambiguous reference to twin or multiple birth from dynastic Egypt' as John Baines writes in his excellent article on Egyptian twins, or whether the expression *pr.n.fm ht hn' .i m hrw pn* – 'he went forth with me from the womb on that day' is simply a Semitic figure of speech, is open to question. A letter written by the king of Amurru to another, unrelated one, namely the king of Ugarit, tends to support the second alternative: 'My brother, look: I and you are brothers. Sons of a single man, we are brothers. Why should we not be in good terms with each other? Whatever desire you will write to me, I will satisfy it; and you will satisfy my desires. We form a unit.' The expression 'sons of a single man' is very similar to 'he went forth with me from the womb on that day'. In my opinion, it is very risky to conclude to any blood ties between brothers, whenever the equal status between two people is clearly emphasized, such as in the last example, the case of Hor and Suty, or that of Hatshepsout and Thutmose III.

(Revez 1997)

Though the foundation of Baines's twin theory may now be called into question, the intimate poses and gestures of the two manicurists in the iconographic displays within their tomb still requires attention. Are the two manicurists closer to Revez's definition of metaphorical 'brothers', perhaps alter egos of men who are on equal footing with each other, both sharing the same values and holding the same power? They both shared the same titles of royal manicurist and overseer of the manicurists in the palace of the king. They also both received equal offerings in the tomb and are portrayed the same number of times. But there are curious subtle differences in their representations and intimate nuances that need to be addressed.

Nadine Cherpion, in her work '*Sentiment conjugal et figuration à l'Ancien Empire*' (1995), provides a useful model for cataloguing and analysing intimate scenes in Old Kingdom iconography. Cherpion gathered intimate portraits of husbands and wives from tombs of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Dynasties, and demonstrates that certain innovative iconographic principles existed in the Old Kingdom to portray conjugal sentiment. Comparing the representations of the pairing of the two manicurists with Cherpion's identifications is, I believe, a plausible methodology for showing how the pairing of the two manicurists relates to iconographic trends that existed in the Old Kingdom. This analysis then allows me to speculate on the nature of the relationship between Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep. Adopting such a methodology is all the more important because of the total lack of any inscription indicating the two men's biological relationship to each other.

Both Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep had wives and children. But the portrayal of the two men with their respective wives in their joint tomb reveals none of the innovative intimacies of the times. Instead, that intimacy was reserved for the two men to share. The wives are shown throughout this tomb except in the offering chamber. I discuss the imagery found in the entrance hall, the inner rock-cut chamber, and the offering chamber.

Entrance hall

Just inside the entrance, past the names and titles of the two manicurists, is an example of the fowling and fish-spearing motif. On the western side of the doorway Niankhkhnum, in the presence of his wife and children, is shown fowling while his wife smells a lotus. In contrast, Khnumhotep, on the eastern side of the door, also in the presence of his wife and children, is shown spearing two fish; his wife also smells a lotus.

Beyond the marsh hunting scene on the jams of the doorway opening into the tomb are scenes depicting the transport of the statues of the deceased. Here there is a double statue of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep holding hands. This portrayal of the statues of the two men holding hands compares with other Old Kingdom statues of husbands and wives holding hands, indicating conjugal sentiment, as in the double statue of Nikaoukhnum and wife, now in Leipzig (Cherpion 1995: pl. 4c, Ägyptisches Museum 3155, Leipzig).

Inside the doorway on the eastern wall of the entrance hall sit Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep in an interlocking, and almost equal embrace, greeting the offering bearers to their tomb (Fig. 1; see also Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: pl. 28). Here though, as throughout the tomb, Niankhkhnum is positioned in front of his companion Khnumhotep;

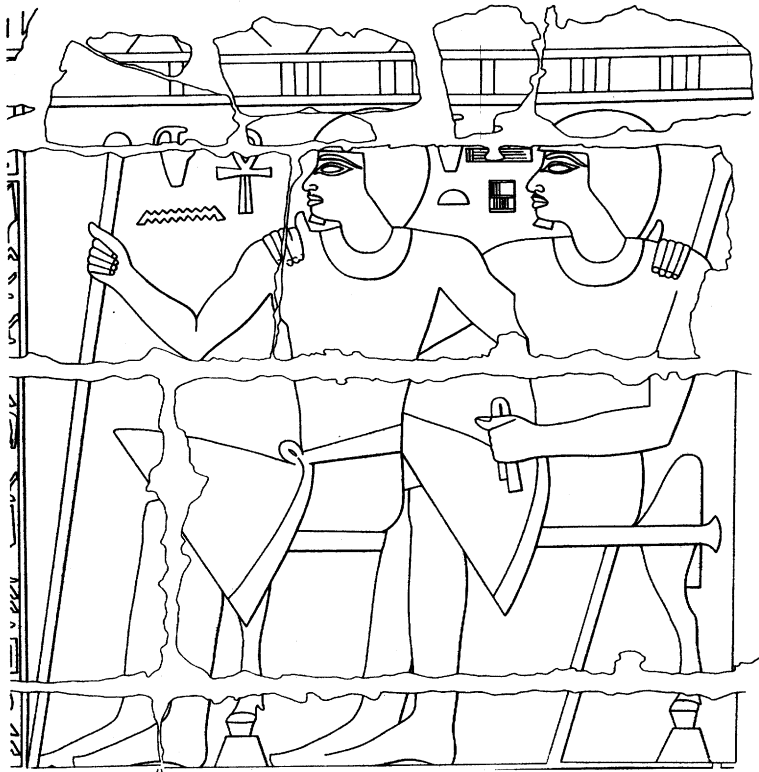


Figure 1 Detail of the two manicurists sitting and receiving offerings (after Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: Abb.11. Line drawing: W. Ruhm. Permission Deutsches Archäologisches Institut).

the latter depicted in a position usually taken by the female in scenes of different gendered couples (Schäfer 1986: 174–5). Cherpion provides a similar example of coupling in the statue of Imapepi and his wife, as seen from behind (Cherpion 1995: pl. 7a). Also, an offering slab recovered from deeper in the tomb for the son of Niankhkhnum, Hamre, and his wife Tjeset shows the common iconographic portrayal of husband and wife (Plate 2). Hamre and his wife sit in chairs receiving their son, the offering bearer. Hamre is in front, while his wife is seated behind him, extending her arm behind her husband's back grasping his right shoulder.

Below the scene of the two men sitting, greeting their offering bearers, are five registers. The first two registers are of ten offering bearers each, while the third is of ten individuals portrayed slightly larger than the offering bearers above (see Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: pl. 29). The scene in the third register is central to the main argument put forward by researchers to advocate a genetic relationship between Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep. Depicted at the front of this line of figures is a male and female couple followed by two men, three women, and three men. Most of the people in the line have connections to weaving, but the man in front is a ship's captain. The two men at the end of the line are shown holding hands. Their names just above identify them as Niankhkhnum, who is leading, and Khnumhotep.



Plate 2 Detail of Hamre and his wife Tjeset (after Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: Tafel 80b. Photo: D. Johannes. Permission Deutsches Archäologisches Institut).

The argument proposed by Baines, Moussa and Altenmüller, and others is that the man and women are the parents of the two who follow, i.e. the two manicurists are siblings. But, there are in fact three possibilities that need to be considered. First, the man and women are the parents of both Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep. But also, the man and women could be the parents of one of the men, probably Niankhkhnum as his family has a slight prominence in the iconography of the tomb. Or, finally, the man and woman are not the parents of either Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep. As is usually the case Old Kingdom tombs, there is no textual statement identifying family relationships in such scenes.

Whatever the relationship between the leading male and female couple to the following Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, viewers are confronted with a leading male and female couple balanced by a same-sex couple behind. Interestingly, both the female of the leading couple and Khnumhotep are shown not raising one arm to their chests while holding on to their male partners. This suggests the two couples were perceived to be alike in some way. It should be noted here that it is Niankhkhnum who leads his companion by the hand in this group, and into their tomb.

The endowment text, which was placed in front of the two embracing men, states, in language, though not unique to this tomb, that their families (the children of their wives

or anyone else) shall not interfere in their funeral arrangements, and mentions ‘fathers and mothers and those who are in the necropolis’. Though it cannot be said whether the use of fathers and mothers in the plural refers to more than one generation, it is clear the tomb owners wanted their funeral arrangements to be as respected for themselves as for the fathers and mothers who are in the necropolis (Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: Sz.12.1). Once again Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep were aligned with married couples.

On the southern wall of this entrance hall, there is a representation of the two men holding hands and walking on a tour of inspection (Plate 3). Again, it is Niankhkhnum who leads Khnumhotep by the hand into the inner spaces of their tomb. This bears a close resemblance to a husband and wife scene (Fig. 2), where Mereruka leads his wife Wa’tetkhethor into the tomb and into their conjugal bed (Cherpion 1995: 47).

Inner rock-cut chamber

At the entrance to the inner rock-cut chamber the two men appear above the doorway on opposite sides with offerings piled up between them (Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: Sz. 24.1–24.2). Niankhkhnum is on the western side and Khnumhotep sits on the eastern side smelling a lotus. Lotus-smelling by a man is a rare occurrence in the Fifth Dynasty



Plate 3 Niankhkhnum leading Khnumhotep by the hand into their tomb (after Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: Tafel 35a. Photo: D. Johannes. Permission Deutsches Archäologisches Institut).

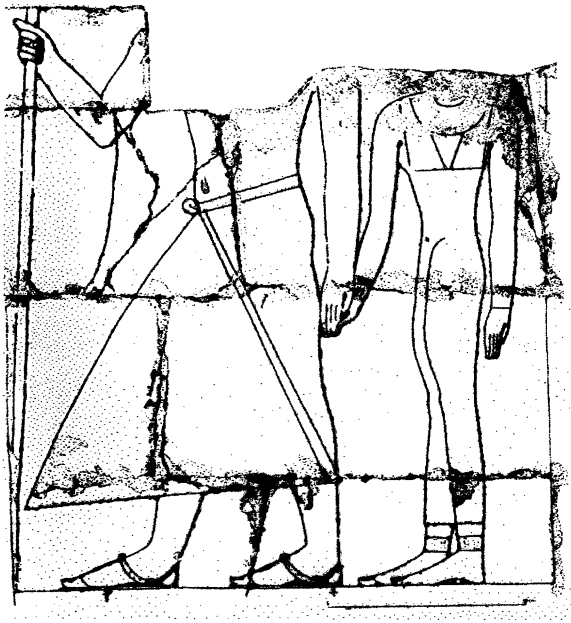


Figure 2 Mereruka leading his wife by the hand (after Duell 1938: pl. 14).

iconography (see Harpur 1987: fig. 52, where her example of a man smelling a lotus is in fact of Khnumhotep). It became much more prevalent in later Dynasties (common in Eighteenth Dynasty). Usually it is women who are shown smelling lotus at this time in the Old Kingdom. In this tomb it is only the women and Khnumhotep who are depicted smelling lotus.

Moving into the rock-cut chamber, and on the far southern end, is an elaborate banquet scene (Fig. 3). Here Niankhkhnum is pictured on the eastern side and Khnumhotep on the western side. This banquet scene is not only noteworthy for its fine details of musicians, dancers, and singers but also because of what was purposefully erased by the ancient craftsmen. Just behind Niankhkhnum was a carving of his wife, Khentikaus, originally represented only slightly smaller than her husband. This would have been the only place in the tomb where a wife was portrayed almost equal in height to her husband and pictured embracing her husband. In all other representations of the two men's wives in this tomb, the women are noticeably smaller than their husbands. This is, in fact, a common way of depicting wives.

This particular scene is noted by Cherpion as an example of conjugal figuration (Cherpion 1995: 46). But Khentikaus was removed by the designers of the tomb, leaving only suggestive remnants of her presence. All that remain are faint outlines of her fingers; one hand can be seen grasping Niankhkhnum's shoulder, while her other hand holds his arm. For some reason it was decided to change the content of this banquet scene significantly, and Khentikaus's image was plastered over, making the two companions Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep the only honoured guests at their banquet (Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: Sz. 31).

Interestingly, on the opposite side of the banquet scene, where Khnumhotep is seated, no room was planned for his wife to be depicted seated behind him. His back is up against

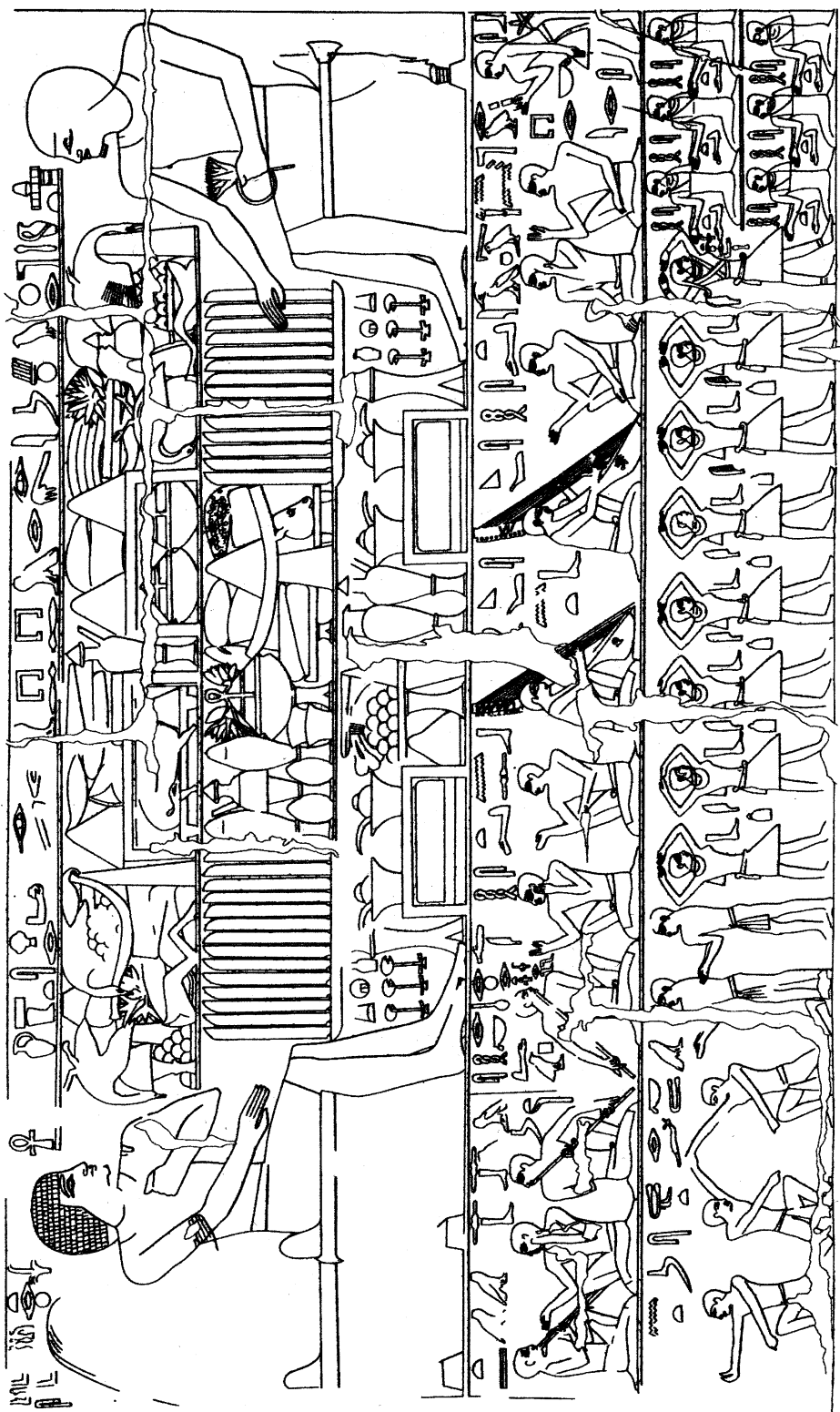


Figure 3 The banquet scene (after Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: Abb. 25. Permission Deutsches Archäologisches Institut).

the wall, and he sits holding a lotus. Perhaps it was originally thought only Niankhkhnum had the stature not only to allow his wife to be shown but also to allow a false door and offering tables for his eldest son Hamre and his wife Tjeset. This would also explain the earlier 'family' scene (if that is indeed what it is) featuring only Niankhkhnum's family. Khnumhotep then was repeatedly treated more like Niankhkhnum's spouse.

Underneath the image of Khnumhotep holding a lotus is a special musical scene (Fig. 4). A musical director is facing three singers and two harpists. He makes a very interesting comment that is carved in front of him. He tells this group to 'play the one about "The Two Divine Brothers"' (Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: Sz. 31.2). The epithet '*snwj ntrwj*' in other contexts refers to Horus and Seth (see Erman and Grapow 1926–63: 4, 145.8), and it should be considered as such here. There are strong suggestions as to what kind of song might have been sung to two intimate male friends at a banquet, a banquet that, when shared by husband and wife, could have had erotic elements coded into the scene (Robins 1988: 63). An account of Horus and Seth from the 'Chester Beatty Papyrus I' is famous for its bawdy descriptions of the attempted sexual penetration of Horus by Seth, said to have taken place after a banquet. Another Middle Kingdom hieratic text on papyrus from el-Lahun also speaks of this narrative myth of Horus and Seth. Parkinson suggests the seduction of Horus is motivated by desire, for Seth utters to Horus what Parkinson refers to as 'The earliest recorded chat-up line – "How lovely your backside is"' (Parkinson 1991: 120).

Texts discovered in the Pyramid of Pepi I bring the tradition closer in time to the tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, and describe the encounter between Horus and Seth as a much more mutually reciprocal sexual action. It states: 'Horus insinuated his semen into the backside of Set and Set insinuated his semen into the backside of Horus' (Parkinson 1995: 65). This is the earliest indication we have that defines the sexual encounter between Horus and Seth, though violent, as completely reciprocal. The oral tradition associated with these tales makes the likelihood of their inclusion in song not that hard to accept, particularly a song we know was entitled 'The two divine brothers'. This was possibly a ribald song sung as part of the entertainment at this elaborate banquet.



Figure 4 Detail from the banquet of the musical conductor asking to 'play the one about The Two Divine Brothers' (after Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: Abb.25. Line drawing: W. Ruhm. Permission Deutsches Archäologisches Institut).

Offering chamber

The first extremely intimate portrait of the two companions appears at the entrance to their offering chamber, to the west of the banquet scene (Plate 4). Niankhkhnum is on the proper right, in front of and supporting Khnumhotep's forearm, while Khnumhotep embraces his companion with his arm placed behind Niankhkhnum's back grasping his shoulder. Khnumhotep embraces while Niankhkhnum supports. Their children surround them, but their wives are not included. This is paralleled in the tomb of Kai at Giza, where the wife embraces her husband, and the children are depicted on either side of the couple (KMT 1997: 23). Another example can be found in the tomb of Uhemka at Giza, where the wife places her hand on her husband's shoulder, just as Khnumhotep does, and clasps her husband's forearm as Niankhkhnum does (Cherpion 1995: 41).

Inside the small offering chamber of the tomb two false doors were constructed, one



Plate 4 The embrace at the entrance to the offering chamber (Photo: Greg Reeder).

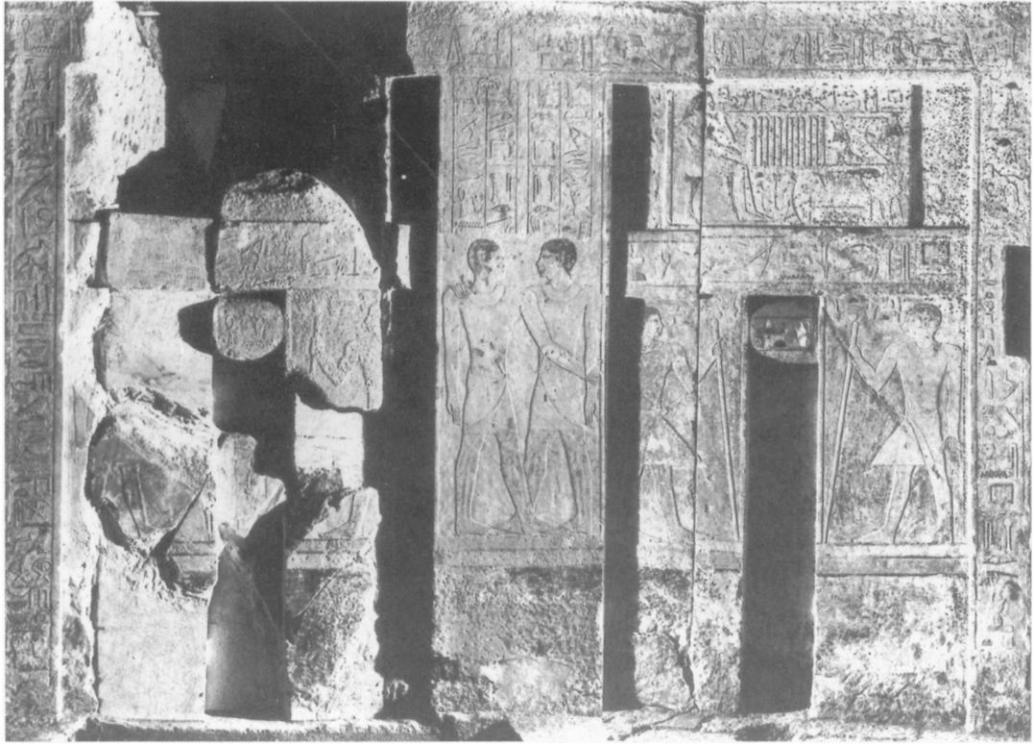


Plate 5 The false doors of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep (after Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: Tafel 92a and b. Photo: D. Johannes. Permission Deutsches Archäologisches Institut).

each for Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep on the west wall. Khnumhotep's false door is to the right and Niankhkhnum's to the left (Plate 5). Niankhkhnum's false door was almost completely destroyed by ancient grave robbers but enough of it remains to understand its composition.

The intimate embrace between the two manicurists between these two false doors is that image Basta first saw in 1964 (Plate 1). In keeping with other representations of the couple in the tomb, Niankhkhnum is on the proper right supporting the embracing Khnumhotep. Though face to face, they are not as intimate as in the embrace at the entrance to the offering chamber. This entire composition closely resembles, and could very well have been copied from, the only slightly earlier tomb of Nefer and Kha-hay. This tomb is located in the same part of the cemetery, near the causeway of Unas. The composition and iconographic vocabulary of the false doors here are almost identical to the tomb of the two manicurists (Moussa and Altenmüller 1971: 32). Kha-Hay stands on the proper right facing his wife Meret-Yetes. They gaze directly at each other, a rare pose in and of itself (Plate 6). Their own false doors flank the scene. The entry in the publication of the tomb is worth noting. 'The space between the false doors of Ka-Hay and Meret-Yetes depicts the couple in an affectionate face to face position. The wife passes her right arm behind her husband's back, the hand clasping his right shoulder' (Moussa and Altenmüller 1971: 36).

Directly opposite the false doors, and on the reverse side of the entrance column where

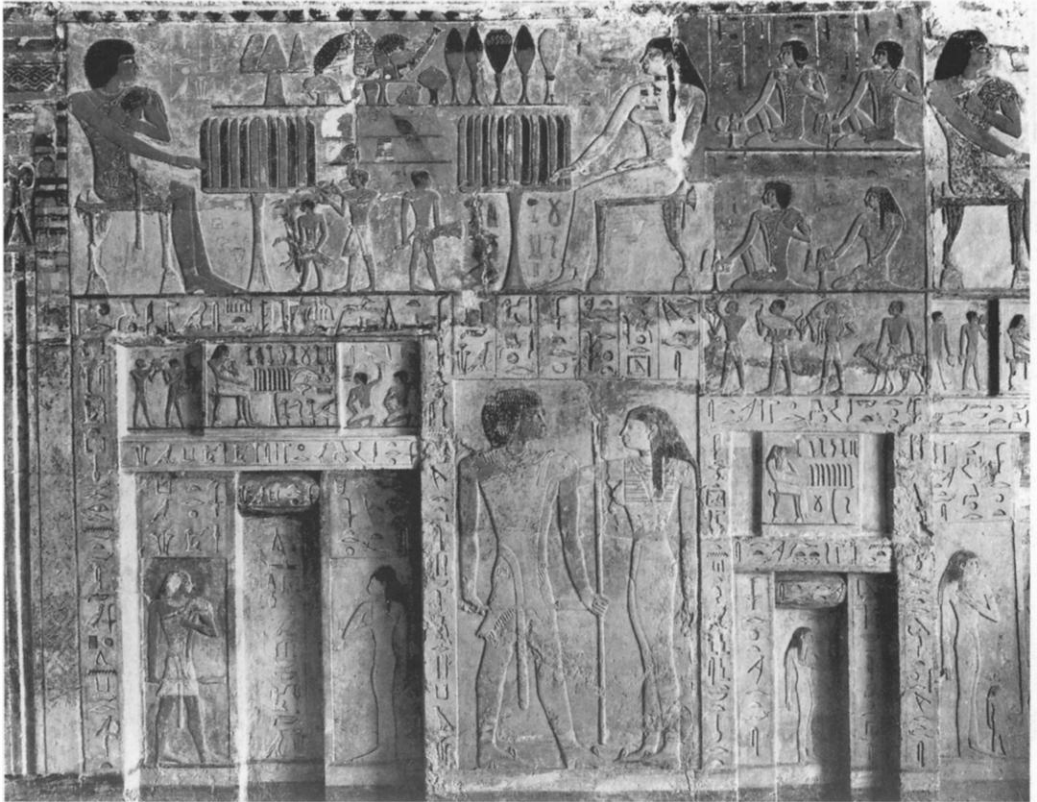


Plate 6 The false doors of Kha-Hay and Meret-yetes (after Moussa and Altenmüller 1971: pl. 32. Photo: D. Johannes. Permission Deutsches Archäologisches Institut).

the two men embrace surrounded by their children (Plate 4), is the most intimate embrace of all between the two men: Niankhkhnum to the right and Khnumhotep to the left (Plate 7). This time they are more intimate than before, and much more so than the image of husband and wife in the Nefer and Kha-Hay tomb. Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep are not only shown very close here – face to face and nose to nose – but so close that the knots on their belts are touching, linking their lower torsos. As in the tomb of Nefer and Kha-Hay, the couple direct their gaze towards each other.

Conclusion

Space here does not permit a detailed survey on the subject of homosexuality in Ancient Egypt (see Parkinson 1995). Suffice it to say that the few references there are appear to refer to a certain antipathy towards the specific sexual act of anal intercourse rather than male to male intimacy and affection in this phallocentric society (Hare 1999: 145 ff). The ideal Egyptian family consisting of father, mother, and children was central to society and official discourse. But sometimes we see glimpses of other relationships existing in spite of official attitudes. Cherpion (1995) suggests that during the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth



Plate 7 Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep embrace in the offering chamber (Photo: Greg Reeder).

Dynasties there was much experimentation in the ways that affection could be represented between husband and wife on official monuments. It was during this window of opportunity that two men, manicurists to the king, were able to construct their own monument.

Cherpion's analysis in identifying and classifying conjugal constructs offers a chance to view the relationship between Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep in a different light. Choices were made in the way Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep planned the 'decoration' of their tomb. Although evidence exists that other family members were buried in their tomb, the tomb was built for the two manicurists to co-habit for eternity. Their wives'

appearance is perfunctory and in a known instance where space was initially planned to show a wife (the banquet scene in the rock chamber) a decision was made to remove her figure *after* she had been placed there. The choice was also made to not show husband and wife gazing into each other's eyes as in the tomb of Nefer and Kha-Hay. Instead the choice was made to show the two men directing their gaze into each other's eyes, while in intimate embraces.

I agree somewhat with John Baines when he says: 'Since the embracing and hand-holding scenes are unique in private tombs, little can be said about their meaning beyond the fact that they express publicly the close involvement of the two men' (Baines 1985: 467). The hand-holding and embracing scenes may be unique between men of equal station in private tombs but not for husband and wife. It is when the totality of intimate scenes in the tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep are compared to the innovative conjugal figurations of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Dynasties of the Old Kingdom that same-sex desire and sentiment must be considered as a probable explanation. Whatever the biological relationship may have been between Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, their iconographic vocabulary was most closely aligned to that used to portray conjugal sentiment between husband and wife. Their representation was unique, and deviates from what appears to be the norm for the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Dynasties of the Old Kingdom.

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NUDITY IN ANCIENT EGYPT

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Nudity, our primal state, evoked complex and subtle reactions among the ancient Egyptians.¹ In their art and literature, the Egyptians used nudity to convey more than social status. The nude or partially nude human figure could express several emotions, serve cultic functions, or show a person's age. Nudity reveals a fundamental characteristic of Egyptian culture—the intricate interweaving of subtlety and simplicity, the ability to see the complexities in the simple. Yet, at the same time, because they were also a purposeful and matter-of-fact people, they used nudity deliberately, even with a measure of restraint. This seeming modesty was an aspect of the ancient Egyptians that appealed most to the Victorians.²

The Abjectness of Nudity. Although nudity appears in Egyptian art long before it does in texts, the earliest appearance of the word *h3y*, “the naked (one),” reveals much about the ancient Egyptians’ conceptions of it. Throughout their history, the standard autobiography usually introduced a list of the good deeds of the deceased with the phrase “I gave bread to the hungry, beer to the thirsty, and clothes to the naked.”³ This reflects an attitude also found in the Bible, where hunger and nakedness are signs of abject poverty and extreme deprivation. In Egyptian texts, however, the words for “nakedness” and their derivatives rarely appear outside of this common *topos*.

Yet it is in association with death—the ultimate deprivation—that nudity initially

makes its appearance in historic Egypt. Most Egyptologists agree that the famous Narmer Stela is probably the first recognizably written document from ancient Egypt.⁴ In the top register of the recto, the triumphant Narmer, in full royal regalia, views his slain enemies, who are lying in two neat rows, bound and naked, their decapitated heads placed between their feet. In the Second Dynasty, the same motif is repeated on the statue of King Khasekhem.⁵ In the relief drawings on the base, the king's slain foes, nude, are sprawled in wildly contorted positions. In death, their nakedness strips them of dignity and magnifies the pathos of their defeat. This primitive method of expressing victory by laying bare enemies' corpses continued into the New Kingdom and the Late Period.⁶ Dead foes were not the only ones thus humiliated, however; battle and victory scenes of all periods will occasionally show stripped and bound enemies being led away by their clothed Egyptian captors. Egyptian miscreants were also humiliated in this fashion: their clothes were first stripped off; then they were tied and beaten in front of an official.⁷ Nudity thus became a uniform of defeat and humiliation.

One of the most powerful examples of nudity as a symbol of an abject and defenseless state appears at the end of the Fifth Dynasty in the so-called “Famine Reliefs” from the causeway to the pyramid of King Unas at Abusir.⁸ This moving and pathetic scene depicts an unidentified

group of obviously starving skeletal men and women, each nude except for a waistband about their hips and an occasional collar, all so weak that they must prop each other up in order to sit erect upon the ground.

Nudity As an Occupational Costume.

Given the association of nakedness with poverty and destitution, it is hardly surprising to find that nudity was frequently connected with class differences in Egypt. During the Old Kingdom especially, there are many relief scenes and statues that depict common laborers working in the nude. Although at times there is little to distinguish the costume of a high official from a lesser functionary or even from an ordinary worker, men and women of the upper classes appear without clothes only in the rarest of circumstances. Nonetheless, the Egyptians seem to have been a relatively modest people, for nudity among laborers is largely restricted to certain genres in Egyptian art and tends to diminish with the passage of time. Nudity is common only among those whose work was particularly hot, dirty, or wet: farmers, field hands, potters, herdsmen, boatmen, fishermen, and men working close to fires or ovens. Undress was not obligatory, however, and except where actual immersion in water was required, versions of the same scenes exist with the laborers clothed. On occasion, some workers apparently felt that their leg movement was encumbered by their garments and so would reverse their short kilts, covering only their buttocks and exposing their genitals.⁹

Although it is much less common than its female counterpart, male nudity is occasionally found in connection with entertainment. On the whole, men danced in special costumes or a short kilt and most

often in connection with religious or festive occasions.¹⁰ Nude dancing among men was not common; most instances seem to have involved dwarfs,¹¹ perhaps playing the role of the god Bes, or else were of normal men performing a dance with humorous intent—i.e., as masked grotesques.¹²

By comparison, work-connected female nudity is far less common, with the exception of dancers, servants, and entertainers. If the nature of their work required women to undress, then normally just the breasts were bared; working women only rarely stripped entirely. In some occupations, women wore a short kilt or loincloth exactly like the men's garment. On the whole, there seems to have been some sense of propriety involved in occupational nudity.

The Nudity of Innocence and Rebirth. As in many other societies, the normal costume of Egyptian children was nudity. As an additional mark of their age, children of both sexes usually wore their hair plaited into a characteristic sidelock. Nudity was typical of children whether they were playing outdoors or were depicted with their parents in formal portraits. Although young children of the wealthy are sometimes shown wearing such ornamentation as necklaces or bracelets, they continued to wear no clothes before they reached puberty or slightly beyond. At this time, young men apparently also underwent circumcision, a practice that distinguished the Egyptians from many of their neighboring peoples and that also can be useful in determining the age of some male nudes, as we will see below.¹³

Since we all come into this world naked, it is not surprising that the Egyptians thought that in the next world they would

be reborn nude. This belief may explain the uncommon epithet *h}y* “the naked (one),” given to Osiris, the deity who symbolizes life after death par excellence. A number of Old Kingdom reliefs depict the manufacture of nude statuary as part of the funerary equipment, presumably to provide the tomb owner with a youthful and pure new body for his existence after death.¹⁴ However, this rebirth would not be as a child, but in the full vigor of youth since nearly all the examples show the subject in a striding posture and circumcised. Wooden nude statuary of this type has actually been found in situ in a *serdab* (statue chamber) at Saqqara. The practice is also attested at Giza, where a few similar examples have been found, some of which are in stone.¹⁵ Since there was no free space between the sides and arms of such statuary, it would have been difficult to cover these works with clothing, as may have been done with some royal and divine statuary. Instead, the private statues appear to have been created with the intention of providing the deceased with a means of rejuvenation in the afterlife. Three wooden sculptures of a Sixth Dynasty official from Sedment makes this purpose especially clear since his nude statues depict him, in varying sizes, first as a child with his hands at his side, then as a youth with a staff, and, finally, presumably as a mature young man with both a scepter and a staff (Fig. 3).¹⁶

Royal Rebirth in the Afterlife. Many modes of representation among private people have their counterparts in the royal sphere, including the nudity of rebirth. Because of the special position of the king not only as the temporal ruler but as a religious figure as well, there was a pronounced tendency

to treat him with greater decorum. As a consequence, several royal examples apparently show the type of rebirth in the afterlife, with the king in a distinctly childish squatting posture, sucking on his index finger which is placed at the corner of his mouth, his hair in the usual sidelock, like the “child” determinative; but he is nonetheless dressed instead of nude. The connection of these examples with the afterlife is best seen on a cosmetic box from the tomb of Tutankhamun in which one of the squatting figures appears with a black face. Although black skin can represent a racial type in Egyptian art, in instances where the subject is depicted primarily as a ruddy skinned individual, black color is associated with Osiris, whose skin normally appears either black or green, colors associated with vegetation and rebirth. In the case of other monarchs, the king is shown naked in the same posture just described, with his knees apart just enough to reveal that he is circumcised—and thus not a child—at his rebirth.¹⁷ The private statuary associated with rebirth, however, does not use black skin.

Nude Gods, Goddesses, and Kings. The subject of divine and royal nudity in Egyptian art is difficult because, just as it is in the private sphere, nudity is closely connected with the complex problem of rejuvenation and rebirth in the next world. Unlike the private sphere, there is some textual material from royal mortuary texts that may cast light upon the phenomenon. In the case of royal statuary, however, the problem is made more complex by the varying posture of the figures.

Beginning with the Old Kingdom, several representations of kings in relief and in the round depict him squatting on the

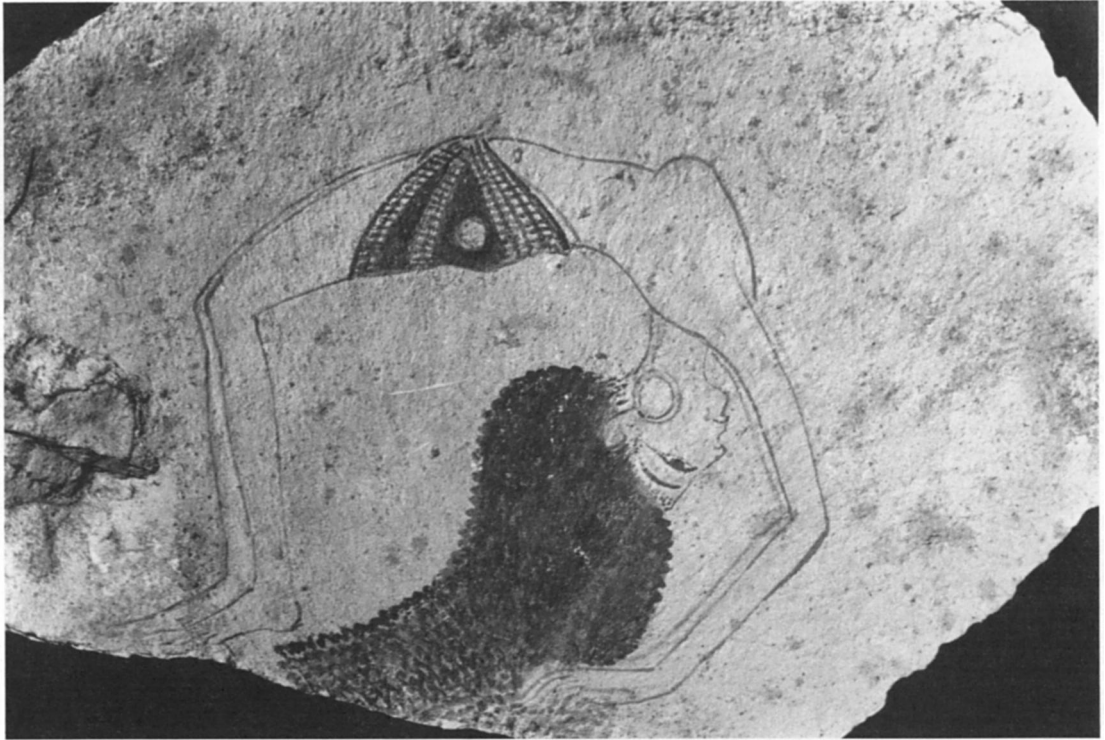


Fig. 1 Acrobatic female dancer. Probably Nineteenth Dynasty. Painted limestone ostracon from Deir el-Medineh. Turin Museum 7052

ground. Many, but not all, of these also show the king unclothed and with several attributes associated with childhood. In this genre, besides the squatting posture, his childlike characteristics are reinforced by depicting him with a child's sidelock and sucking his index finger, yet, at the same time, wearing a crown or diadem and holding either a crook or a flail.

Although the young sons and daughters of the king were occasionally shown without clothes, the mature, ruling monarch is rarely, if at all, depicted nude. The only examples of adult royal nudity in art are either questionable or depict the monarch as a youthful god. In the Old Kingdom, for

example, a pair of copper statues show King Pepi I and his son (?) without clothing or ornamentation.¹⁸ However, both figures are shown in the normal posture for a striding statue—left foot forward and right arm extended in front—and in both, the hands have a hole in each clenched fist, probably to allow the figures to hold a staff and a scepter. The nudity of these pieces may be explained either by their comparison to similar private works, discussed above, or by the inscription of the Middle Kingdom official Ikhnofret,¹⁹ who describes how, in his office of stolist, he tended the statue of the god Osiris—adorning it, bedecking it with collars, jew-



Fig. 2 "Paddle doll." Middle Kingdom. Wood with mud beads forming the "hair." Provenance unknown. (Photo: courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum, Wilbour Fund, Brooklyn 16.84)

elry, and other finery.²⁰ Several reliefs of the New Kingdom at Abydos and elsewhere depict the king himself engaged in similar activities while tending a divine statue. Nonetheless, there are no relief representations of nude royal sculpture comparable to the private pieces of the Old Kingdom discussed above, nor did the texts cited above mention any dressing of divine statuary beyond jewelry and ointments. The question remains open as to whether some nude cult statues may have been made so that the god or king could be costumed according to the requirements of the occasion.

A much-discussed colossal statue of the "heretic pharaoh" Akhenaten seems to portray the monarch nude. The other feature of this puzzling statue is more remarkable: the monarch seems to be shown without genitals, leading to a great deal of speculation concerning the king's medical pathology.²¹ Even if this piece has been correctly identified as representing Akhenaten, it is more likely that the intent was rather to depict him as a fertility deity, perhaps in the manner of the androgynous fecundity figures (erroneously known as "Nile gods") frequently encountered in Egyptian temple reliefs. These beings—more personifications than true gods—are normally shown clothed, albeit scantily.²² An unusual statuette of unknown date and provenance but convincingly attributed to the early part of the Amarna period by Bianchi may represent the Aten.²³ A standing male figure holds a *hrp*-scepter and is nude except for a penis sheath. Instead of a neck or head, the figure seems to have what appears to be a solar disk.

A few important but specialized deities were naked. The gods Harpokrates and Nefertem were generally shown as nude chil-

dren and embodied childhood, youth, and innocence. Bes, who was associated with children, childbirth, and music, took the form of a nude dwarf.²⁴ The sky goddess Nut usually appears naked, stretched out protectively on the ceiling of tombs, temples, and sarcophagus lids. Often, her mate and cosmological counterpart, the earth god Geb, will be shown naked and falling prostrate beneath her, presumably having just engendered their children. In the Late Period, this motif seems to diminish slowly but surely until Nut is almost always shown garbed in a tight-fitting star-studded dress. In the case of Astarte and Qudshu,²⁵ two goddesses of foreign origin, their nudity seems connected with fertility. Qudshu, who appears standing upon the back of a lioness on some stelae, is striking not only for her youthful, voluptuous nudity, but also because her body appears frontally rather than in profile, a rare mode of relief representation under any circumstances. Her association with fertility seems assured by the presence of the ithyphallic god Min at the side of some of these stelae.

Nudity, Dress, and Fertility in the Representation of Egyptian Women. Where women are concerned, nudity reveals more than their bodies: it also indicates a fundamental ambivalence about their place within ancient Egyptian society. On one hand, Egyptian women apparently enjoyed a relatively high status, particularly compared to other societies of the ancient (and modern) Near East. On the other hand, they lived in a distinctly male-dominated world.²⁶ It is not surprising that the depictions of unclothed females should be overwhelmingly connected with male pleasure, sex, and fertility. Like its male counterpart, female nudity took many forms

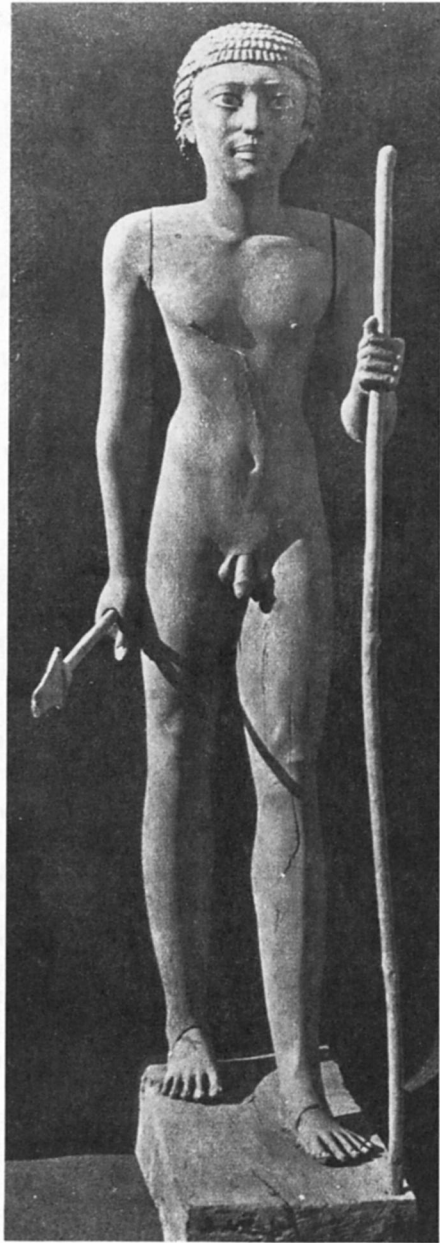


Fig. 3 Wooden statue of Merire-hashetef from Sedment. Sixth Dynasty. In W. M. F. Petrie and G. Brunton, *Sedment*, I (London: 1924), pl. 7. Cairo JE 46992

and is best understood in connection with women's costumes.

Even when they are shown dressed, women appear almost as if they are unclothed. Throughout Egyptian history, most women's garments left the wearer either partially or completely bare-breasted. Although the preference seems to have been for dresses covering the body right to the ankles, leaving only the shoulders and arms bare, women's costumes often appear either so transparent or so formfitting that nothing is left to the imagination. This is especially true during the Amarna period and the late Eighteenth Dynasty, when even female members of the royal family are depicted in elaborate but diaphanous dresses. Although men are occasionally shown aged or portly, depictions of women in anything but an idealizing fashion are uncommon. Nude or dressed, women will normally be rendered so as to emphasize their sexuality and fertility: pretty, youthful faces, full breasts set off by a small waist and wide hips, and callipygian buttocks; the pubic triangle usually distinct, even prominent. Unless they are shown working or embracing a family member, freestanding representations of women in the round, whether these females are dressed or not, almost always depict them with feet together and arms held tightly at their sides. This typical female posture lends a distinctly passive appearance to the subject and was probably adopted to indicate the static, limited role in society that men envisioned for women. Above all, Egyptian art stressed the fertility of women.

Many of the most striking representations of nude women—those clay objects once thought to be “concubine figures”—have been found not only in the tombs of

men, but in burial tombs of women and children as well. Yet, from the context, it seems that these objects may be connected with a desire not merely to ensure the owner's fertility, but to aid in supplying an erotic life in the afterlife since both wigs and body ornamentation play an important role in Egyptian eroticism. Even when they are associated with female burials, these figurines probably do not represent the tomb owners themselves, for the statuettes usually have no feet and often the wigs are not the types worn by noble ladies.²⁷ Furthermore, a number of both types of figurine seem to be adorned with tattoos, a practice limited to servants and the lower classes.²⁸ In several cases, the women, wearing necklaces and elaborately executed wigs and sometimes accompanied by an infant, recline on a bed with their heads upon a headrest.²⁹ These slender women all have exaggerated, small waists that set off broad hips against which the arms and hands lie closely. The legs are invariably close together, but the pelvic region is usually emphasized by indicating pubic hair and labia; and, in most examples where the woman is not shown lying on a bed, the feet have been deliberately omitted, perhaps to ensure that the statuettes could only lie prone.

From the early Eleventh Dynasty, there are wooden figurines grotesquely stylizing this genre of statuette. Known as “paddle dolls,” these enigmatic wooden objects not only omit the arms and legs, but also reduce the head to a featureless point from which dangles a large mass of “corn-rowed” hair made of strings of mud beads.³⁰ Reproduction, not just fertility in general, is clearly the point here, for the breasts are minimally depicted while the genitals are disproportionately large and

carefully drawn. The emphasis on the coiffure is striking; it gives us another example of the importance of wigs and hair in Egyptian eroticism.³¹ As in the later, more refined examples, these strange objects often have brightly colored necklaces, bead girtlets, and tattoos indicated on the elementary torso. In one example in the Brooklyn Museum (Fig. 2), the figure has an erotic scene drawn on the back.

Female Nudity and Entertainment. The most charming and familiar female nudes in Egyptian art are found in tomb paintings and statuettes of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties.³² Judging from numerous paintings of banquets in Theban tombs, a well-appointed dinner party would include scantily clad or nude girls and young women who would either serve the guests food and drink or entertain them with dancing and music. The representations of these servants were given great freedom of motion, pose, and dress, including partial or complete nudity. Few aspects of Egyptian culture express the vitality and love of life of these New Kingdom tomb scenes. As in the case of male nudity, there was undoubtedly some notion of status involved here because women of the upper classes were seldom shown nude except in connection with childbirth or nursing.³³ Interestingly enough, when they were naked, these servant women seem to have attended other women primarily, perhaps out of a sense of propriety. The difference in status occasionally is expressed in the degree of transparency of the garments worn by the servants and the presumably noble guests. Nevertheless, the erotic element is always present in this type of nudity. The Egyptians evidently had discovered the psychological principle

that nudity is even more alluring when it is not total, for these women often wear such ornaments as elaborate coiffures or wigs, earrings, garlands, necklaces, and beaded waistbands that must have rustled seductively as they moved. This kind of waistband, found even in the tombs of wealthy ladies, may have been the ancient equivalent of designer lingerie.³⁴

In many of the banqueting scenes, some of the female musicians are completely or partially undressed, a motif that occurs in other genres besides tomb paintings. At first, the combination of nudity and music may seem incongruous or gratuitous, yet the interconnection between music and eroticism is well established. As literary evidence shows, the goddess Hathor is not only the patron deity of music, but of love as well.

This same costume of nudity is repeated in many New Kingdom wooden statuettes of young women. The women shown in one genre of standing figures immediately convey something on a higher plane than the fertility figurines of the Middle Kingdom. The caliber of the objects alone, with their skillful craftsmanship as well as superior quality of wood and stone, speaks of artistic creation combined with the intent of pleasing the aesthetic senses of the viewer. Comparable works have been found inscribed with names and show the young women dressed in the elegant finery of upper-class ladies. As in painting, the dresses the women wear are virtually transparent, more so than the garments worn by women depicted accompanying their husbands. Unlike the passive postures and footless bodies of the fertility figurines of the Middle Kingdom, in these statuettes the women's bodies are fully formed, and the figures appear to be striding forward

or, in one instance, coyly adjusting the headdress. The coquettishness of some women is enhanced by scented perfume cones on the head or by an object in the hands—in one case, a pet duckling.³⁵ The bodies are slender and do not have the large breasts and hips of earlier depictions. Since several such pieces were found near the site of Amenophis III's harem, they may represent some of the pharaoh's favorites.³⁶

Equally charming are a number of wooden cosmetic spoons or containers in the form of a young woman swimming nude with her hands outstretched. In the loveliest examples, she grasps the legs of a duck that apparently pulls her across the surface of the water.³⁷ Even these swimmers wear jewelry or waistbands, lending the work a subdued touch of eroticism.

Female dancers were often acrobats as well and wore at least a small kilt or loin-cloth while they performed their act, a motif encountered in many wall paintings and some decorated ostraca. The most attractive example is found on a painted limestone flake from Deir el-Medineh and probably dates to the Nineteenth Dynasty (Fig. 1).³⁸ The slim young woman, dressed only in a short kilt open at the front for greater ease of leg movement, is executing a backward somersault. A cruder version of the same scene, sketched only in black paint, shows that such dancer-acrobats were nude beneath their kilts and that their costume was probably intended more for decoration than modesty.³⁹

Nudity and Literature in the New Kingdom. Ancient Egyptian culture shows an unparalleled cohesion between its art and its writing—the two are inseparable. The term for an artist was *sš kdw*, “scribe of the

outline.” A striking confirmation of the closeness of Egyptian language and art can be found in the iconography of feminine beauty, nudity, and allure in the love poetry of the New Kingdom, most of which dates to the Ramesside period. Certain themes are strongly reminiscent of the paintings and statues just discussed. The dress and the undress, the music and the dancing, the ornamentation and the ambience of nudity, the transparent garments, even the perfect body type that we have described also appear in the rich vocabulary and imagery of Egyptian lyric, which has been rightfully compared to the Song of Songs. In the first stanza of a seven-part cycle of love poems, a man describes his lover in a way that, even if the poem does not say so, makes us feel that the woman must be naked at the time. “Shining bright, fair of face, lovely the look of her eyes, sweet the speech of her lips, she has not a word too much. Upright neck, shining breast, hair true lapis lazuli; arms surpassing gold, fingers like lotus buds. Heavy thighs, narrow waist, her legs parade her beauty.”⁴⁰ The last few words recall the ideal female figure of the Victorian era. Ironically, while commending the overall modesty of Egyptian art, the Victorians may have been subconsciously admiring an ancient parallel to their model of nudity and beauty.

Nudity and Sex. Compared to contemporary societies in the ancient world, the Egyptians were remarkably modest about their sexual life in literature and art.⁴¹ The only work that could be considered pornographic by any standard depicts sexual acts not so much with an intent to arouse as to amuse and parody.⁴² The sex as sex is unconvincing and unerotic; both men and

women are unattractive and slovenly; the actors are contorted, or the act takes place in improbable places such as the back of a chariot. Most of the men are not undressed but are still wearing their kilts, which have been twisted around backward, just as they are shown when they are working in the fields or doing other vigorous physical labor. The tendency everywhere is not toward the deliberately erotic or even the sudden passion of the "quickie"; rather, the intent appears to be to depict sex as a comical activity that can show people in all their baseness and weakness. Significantly, on the verso of the same papyrus is a series of delightful scenes of a topsy-turvy world in which animals are engaged in human activities: a hippopotamus perches in a tree; soldier-mice besiege cats in a fortress; a bird climbs a ladder to get into a tree. Taken as a whole, the intent of the papyrus is distinctly satirical.

At the same time, a number of ostraca and other graffitilike sketches have been preserved that have a more erotic intent and depict sex with genuine feeling and tenderness. In these examples, the couple is usually undressed, but occasionally the women wear jewelry, elaborate hair-dresses, and waistbands.

Conclusions. Nudity reveals much more than bodies among the Egyptians: it exposes one of their chief characteristics. In a culture in which we encounter so much of the stereotypical, it is easy to find great subtlety of thought and, simultaneously, a striving for balance and symmetry. Although the Egyptians were an essentially modest people, nakedness was not necessarily a shameful state. Nudity has many aspects, often complemented by a countervailing factor: the pathetic nakedness of the slain enemy can be measured against the vigorous, youthful nudity of rebirth; the nude adolescent appears next to his or her well-dressed parents; the almost-foppish costume of the lord of the manor is shown watching his undressed peasants laboring in the fields; the full-bodied nudity of the goddess Nut arches over deities and kings in their formal garments beneath her; the provocative, yet innocent, nudity of the servant girls, dancers, and musicians enhances the atmosphere of the elegantly attired banquet guests; and, perhaps most telling of all, there is the enticement of ornamentation, in which an elaborate hairdo, a dazzling bead collar, or a small, rustling bead girtlet is used to accentuate the erotic appeal of a woman in her undress.

NOTES

1. For a general treatment of the subject of nudity in ancient Egypt, see P. Behrens, "Nacktheit," *LÄ* 4 (1980):292-294.

2. On prudery and censorship of Egyptian monuments from ancient times through the Christian, Islamic, and modern eras, see H. G. Fischer, "The Mark of a Second Hand on Ancient Egyptian Antiquities," *MMAJ* 9 (1974):11, with references, and S. Schott, "Ein Fall von Prüderie aus der Ramessidenzeit," *ZÄS* 75 (1939):100-106.

3. Many examples have been collected for the period spanning the Old Kingdom to the Middle Kingdom; see, for example, J. Janssen, *De traditioneele Autobiografie vóór het Nieuwe Rijk*, I (Leiden: 1946), pp. 78-81.

4. Cairo JE 32169: PM V 193. M. Saleh and H. Sourouzian, *The Official Catalogue: The Egyptian Museum, Cairo*, trans. P. Der Manuelian and H. Jacquet-Gordon (Mainz am Rhein: 1987), cat. no. 8, with references.

5. Saleh and Sourouzian, cat. no. 14, with references. A good line drawing of the slain enemies can be found in W. S. Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt*, rev. W. K. Simpson (New York: 1981), p. 51.

6. For a discussion of the desecration of dead enemies in ancient Egypt, see K. Zibelius-Chen, "Zur Schmähung des toten Feindes," *WdO* 15 (1984): 80–88.

7. P. Duell et al., *The Mastaba of Mereruka*, I, OIP 31 (Chicago: 1938), pl. 37; N. Davies, *The Rock Tombs of Deir el Gebrâwi*, I, ASE 11 (London: 1902), pl. 8.

8. The most recent discussion of these puzzling reliefs have been done by J. Vercoutter, "Les 'Affamés' d'Ounas et le changement climatique de la fin de l'Ancien Empire," in *Mélanges Gamal Ed-din Mokhtar*, II (Paris: 1985), pp. 327–337.

9. For some typical examples of such scenes, see W. S. Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom*, 2d ed. (London: 1949), pp. 313 (fig. 175), 314 (fig. 177), 322 (fig. 196a).

10. For a summary of dancing in ancient Egypt, see E. Brunner-Traut, "Tanz," *LA* 6 (1985):215–231.

11. An example in the round is provided by a Middle Kingdom group of small ivory figurines that depict nude dwarfs dancing and singing. These figures were originally part of a child's mechanical toy found at Lisht. See W. C. Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt*, I (New York: 1953), p. 223 (fig. 139), and Saleh and Sourouzian, cat. no. 90.

12. A rare example of such a male nude dancer (before it was retouched, presumably to make it suitable for viewing by the museum-going public) can be seen in Fischer, 10 (fig. 8). The partially preserved scene, which appears on a painted leather scroll from Deir el-Bahri and dates to the New Kingdom, seems to show a small-sized nude man (pigmy?) with an outsized penis that strangely extrudes behind him as he dances in front of a fully dressed woman harpist.

13. There are various opinions as to when circumcision took place among the Egyptians—at the onset of puberty, at age fourteen, or as an initiation rite. See C. de Wit, "La Circoncision chez les Égyptiens," *ZAS* 99 (1972):41–48; A. M. Roth, *Egyptian Phyles in the Old Kingdom*, SAOC 48 (Chicago: 1991), pp. 62–72; and E. Wente and J. R. Harris, *X-Ray Atlas of the Royal Mummies* (Chicago: 1980), pp. 236–237.

14. Such scenes have been collected and discussed by M. Eaton-Krauss, *The Representations of Statuary in Private Tombs of the Old Kingdom*, ÄA 39 (Wiesbaden: 1984), p. 33 (section 39). A striking example of a striding nude statue of a Sixth Dynasty official can be found in Saleh and Sourouzian, cat. no. 62. The man is shown with a walking stick and a scepter; it was one of three statues depicting the same man at different stages of his life.

15. H. Junker, *Giza*, 7 (Vienna: 1944), pp. 38–44, esp. the list of Old Kingdom examples on pp. 40–41. See, for example, the statue of the Fifth Dynasty official Snofru-nefer from Giza, in W. Seipel, *Bilder für die Ewigkeit* (Constance: 1983), p. 54 (no. 34).

16. W. M. F. Petrie and G. Brunton, *Sedment*, I, BSAE 34 (London: 1924), pl. 11. The smallest of the series represents the man as a child, but, curiously enough, the middle-sized statue shows him at a greater age than the largest.

17. For discussions of the iconography of the re-born king as a child, see M. Eaton-Krauss, "Eine rundplastische Darstellung Achenatens als Kind," *ZAS* 110 (1983):127–132; E. Feucht, "Verjüngung und Wiedergeburt," *SAK* 11 (1984):401–417; U. Rössler-Köhler, "Der König als Kind, Königsname und Maat-Opfer," in *Studien zu Sprache und Religion Ägyptens*, ed. F. Junge (Göttingen: 1984), pp. 929–946. There is an example of this type of representation on a stamp seal of a private person; see S. R. Glanville, "An Unusual Type of Statuette," *JEA* 17 (1931):98–99. Since seals often are made with amuletic purpose for the afterlife, this object may belong to the same genre as the royal examples.

18. Cairo JE 33034; PM V 193. Smith, *Art and Architecture*, p. 146 (figs. 141, 142), and Saleh and Sourouzian, cat. no. 63, with references.

19. Berlin 1204; PM V 97. This inscription is central to all studies of the religious use of statuary in Egypt and has been translated and discussed often. Two of the most important treatments are R. Anthes, "Die Berichte des Neferhotep und des Ich-ernofret über das Osirisfest in Abydos," in *Festschrift zum 150jährigen Bestehen des Berliner Ägyptischen Museums*, Mitteilungen aus dem Ägyptischen Sammlung 8, ed. H. W. Müller (Berlin: 1974), pp. 15–49, and M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, OBO 84 (Freiburg: 1988), pp. 98–100.

20. The wooden *ka*-statue of the Thirteenth Dynasty monarch Hor (Cairo JE 30948; PM III, 2 888) appears to have been a statue of this type. Although

the statue is now unclothed, it originally had a girdle with a penis sheath attached, an ancient garment worn by gods; see Saleh and Sourouzian, cat. no. 117, and E. R. Russmann, *Egyptian Sculpture: Cairo and Luxor* (Austin: 1989), pp. 77, 95–96. On the penis sheath as an archaic god's costume, see J. Baines, "Ankh-Sign, Belt and Penis Sheath," *SAK* 3 (1975):1–24.

21. See, for example, C. Aldred, *Akhenaten: King of Egypt* (New York: 1988), p. 235, with fig. 33, and J. R. Harris, "Akhenaten or Nefertiti?" *Acta Orientalia* 38 (1977):5–10.

22. For an extensive treatment of these beings and their androgynous aspects, see J. Baines, *Fecundity Figures: Egyptian Personification and the Iconography of a Genre* (Chicago: 1985).

23. See R. S. Bianchi, "New Light on the Aten," *GM* 114 (1990):35–42, and E. Cruz-Urbe, "Another Look at an Aton Statue," *GM* 126 (1992):29–32.

24. For a discussion of the iconography of Bes, see J. F. Romano, "The Origin of the Bes Figure," *BES* 2 (1980):39–56.

25. The goddesses Anat, Astarte, and Qadesh are not always distinguishable and are even occasionally syncretized; see C. Clamer, "A Gold Plaque from Tel Lachish," *Journal of the Tel Aviv Institute of Archaeology* 7 (1980):152–162. Qudshu, also known as Qadesh, is a Palestinian import; see R. Stadelmann, "Qadesh," *LÄ* 5 (1983):26–27.

26. For a general overview of the role of women in Egyptian society, see E. Feucht, "Die Stellung der Frau im alten Ägypten," in *Aufgaben, Rollen und Räume von Frau und Mann*, ed. J. Martin and R. Zoepffel (Munich: 1989), pp. 239–306; a very brief discussion of nudity appears on p. 243. A general overview of the representation of women in Egyptian literature has been made recently by J. Assmann, "Ikonographie der Schönheit im alten Ägypten," in *Schöne Frauen—Schöne Männer: Literarische Schönheitsbeschreibungen*, ed. T. Stemmler (Mannheim: 1988), pp. 12–32.

27. The wig type varies with the period, however. In the New Kingdom, noble ladies are shown in similar wigs while nursing in the nude; see E. Brunner-Traut, "Die Wochenlaube," *MIO* 3 (1955):25–26, and J. Bourriau, *Pharaohs and Mortals: Egyptian Art in the Middle Kingdom* (London: 1988), pp. 124–125, no. 118.

28. For a discussion of such figurines, see Bourriau, pp. 124–127, nos. 118–126, and Hayes, pp. 220–221, with fig. 137.

29. For an extensive discussion of such objects, see G. Pinch, "Childbirth and Female Figurines at Deir el-Medineh and el-'Amarna," *Or* 52 (1983):405–414.

30. For such objects, see Bourriau, pp. 126–127, no. 121, and Hayes, pp. 219–223, with fig. 135. According to Hayes, several "paddle dolls" exhibit Nubian characteristics.

31. On this topic, see especially P. Derchain, "La Perruque et le crystal," *SAK* 2 (1975):56–74.

32. Nudity in such scenes was apparently altered during the Nineteenth Dynasty, a phenomenon that has been attributed to a sense of "prudery" during the Ramesside period but may simply be a reuse of the paintings with modifications to reflect a change of style since the furniture in the paintings was also altered. On this question, see Schott, 100–106, and Fischer, 11, n. 36.

33. See Brunner-Traut, "Die Wochenlaube," 11–30.

34. See M. Eaton-Krauss, in W. K. Simpson *et al.*, *Egypt's Golden Age: The Art of Living in the New Kingdom 1558–1085 B.C.* (Boston: 1982), pp. 242–243 (no. 325).

35. The object serves as an unguent container; see C. Aldred, *New Kingdom Art in Ancient Egypt during the Eighteenth Dynasty: 1570 to 1320 B.C.* (London: 1961), p. 91, nos. 166 and 168, with figures.

36. See *ibid.*, p. 91, nos. 168 and 169, with figures.

37. Saleh and Sourouzian, cat. no. 157, and I. Wallert, *Der verzierte Löffel*, *ÄA* 16 (Wiesbaden: 1967).

38. Museo Egizio, Turin: 7052. See W. Peck, *Egyptian Drawings* (New York: 1978), pl. VI.

39. See *ibid.*, p. 130 (fig. 68).

40. From the P. Chester Beatty I Collection. The translation is from M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, II (Berkeley: 1976), p. 182. Both the number 7 and the allusions to gold connect the poems with the goddess Hathor, the patron deity of love. On this passage, see also M. V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: 1985), pp. 52, 56 (f).

41. On this topic, see especially L. Manniche, "Some Aspects of Ancient Egyptian Sexual Life," *Acta Orientalia* 38 (1979):11–23.

42. J. Omlin, *Der Papyrus 55001 und seine Satirisch-erotischen Zeichnungen und Inschriften* (Turin: 1973).



Penis Sheaths: A Comparative Study

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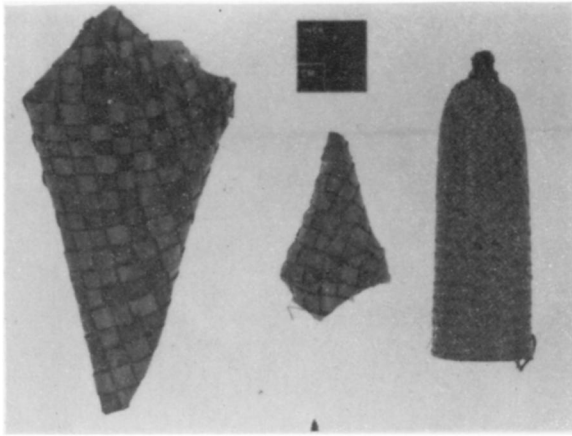


PLATE 1.

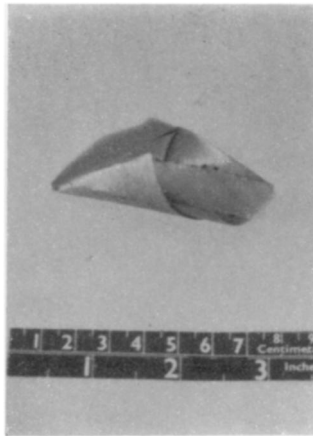


PLATE 2.

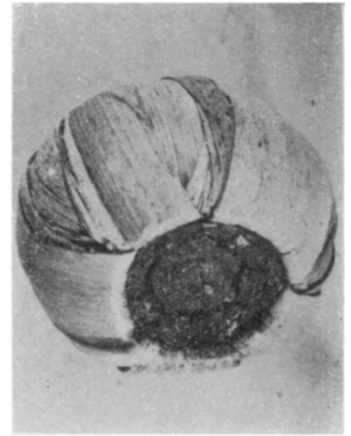


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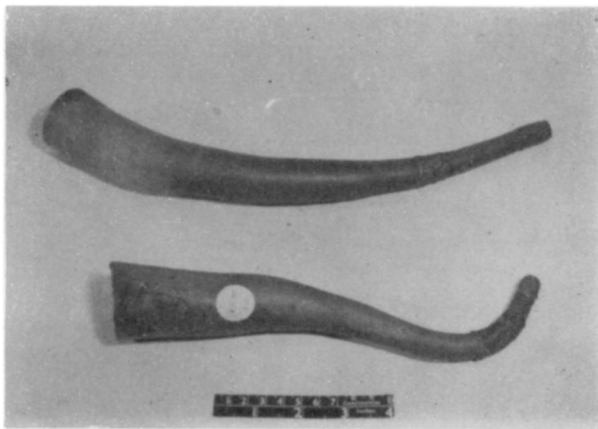


PLATE 4.



PLATE 5.

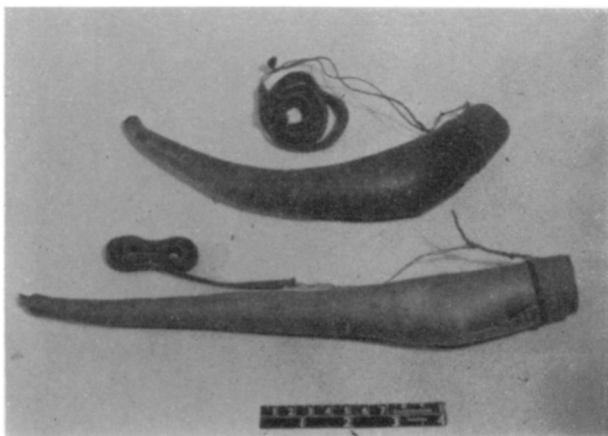


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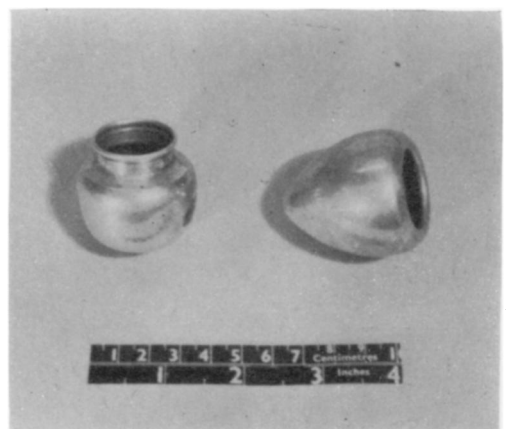


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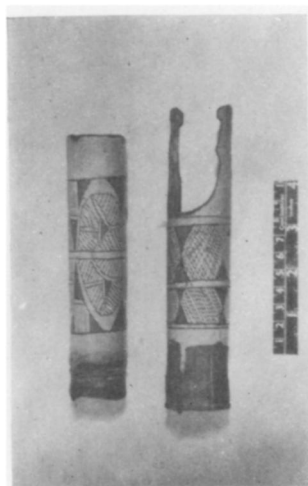


PLATE 8A.

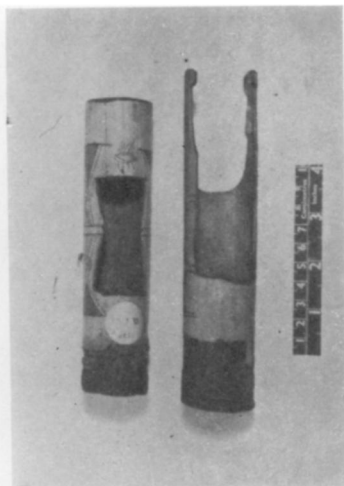


PLATE 8B.

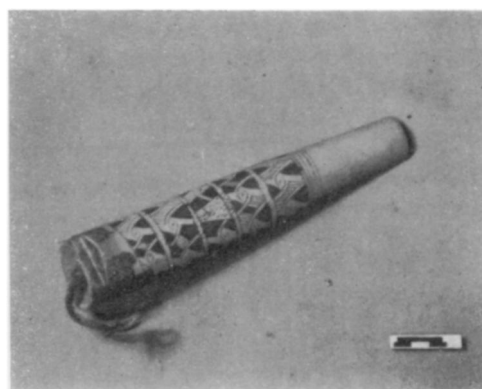


PLATE 9.

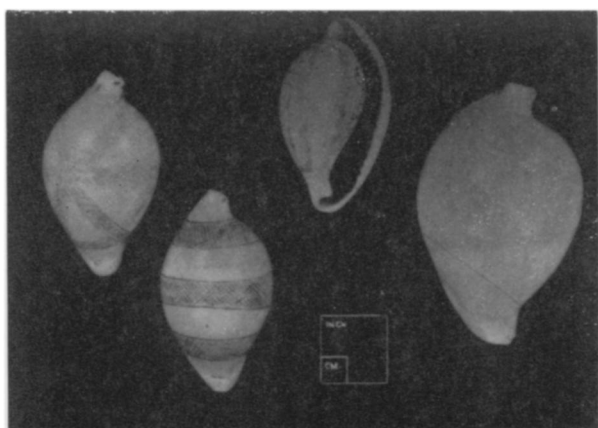


PLATE 10.

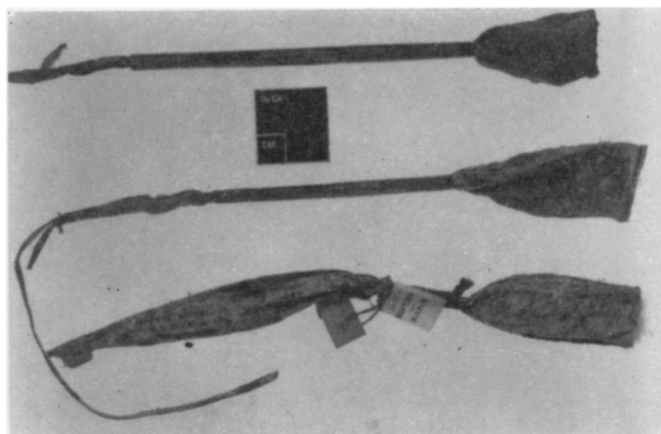


PLATE 11.

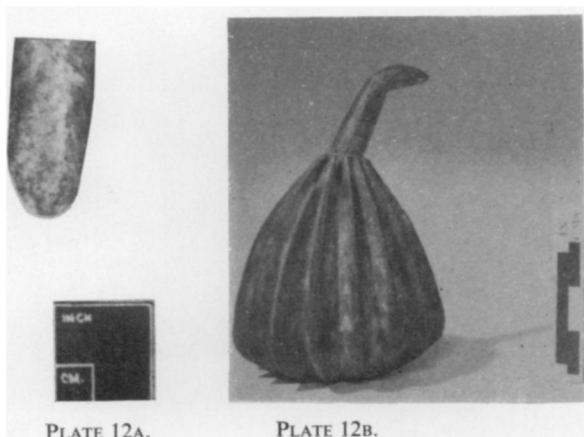


PLATE 12A.

PLATE 12B.



PLATE 12C.

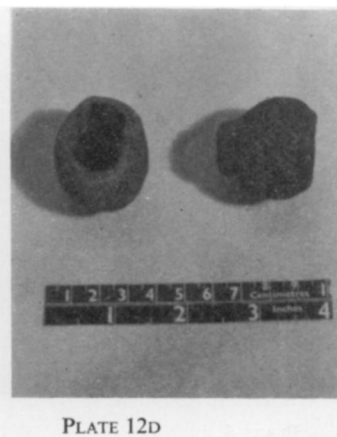


PLATE 12D

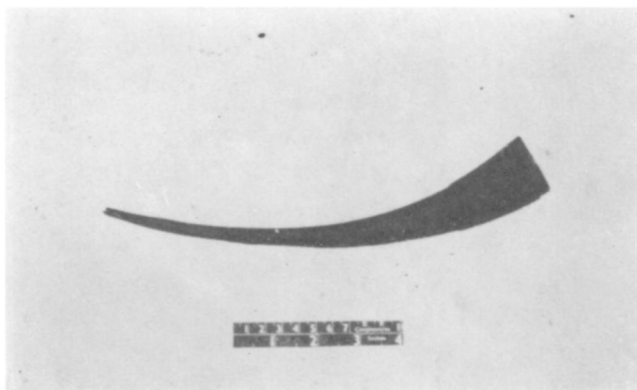


PLATE 13.



PLATE 14.



PLATE 15.



PLATE 16.

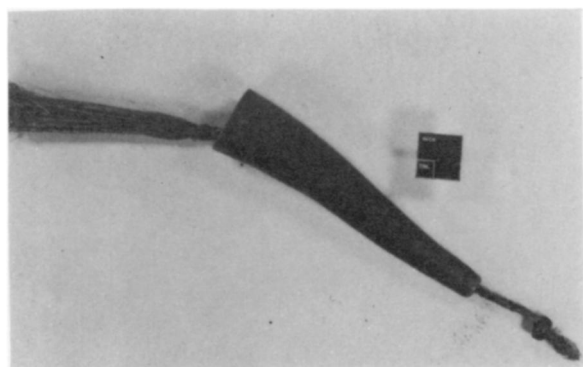


PLATE 17.

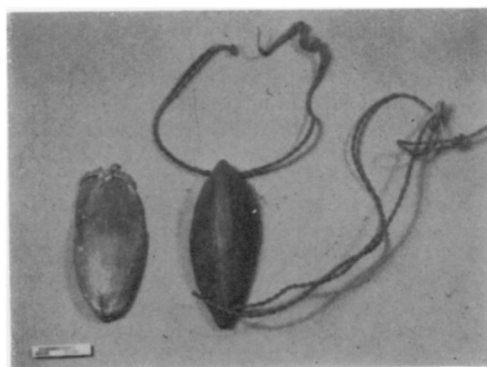


PLATE 18.

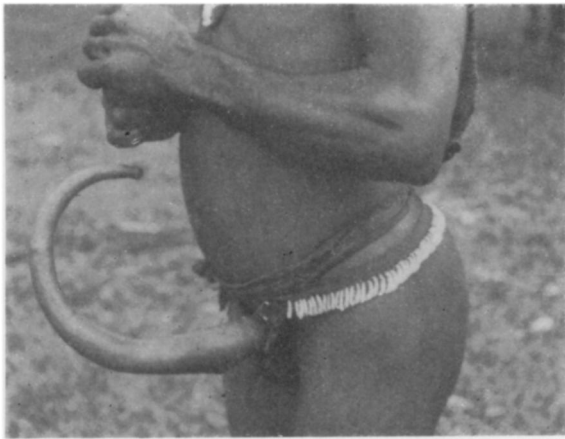


PLATE 19.



PLATE 20.

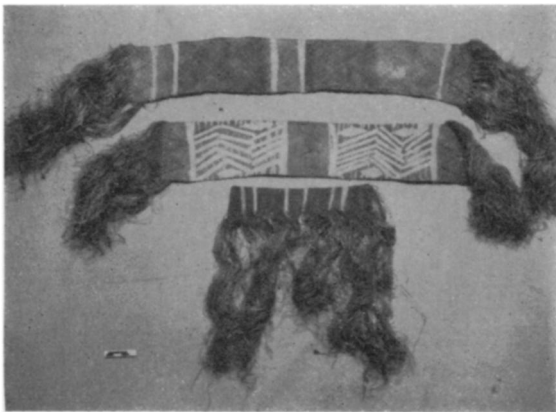


PLATE 21.

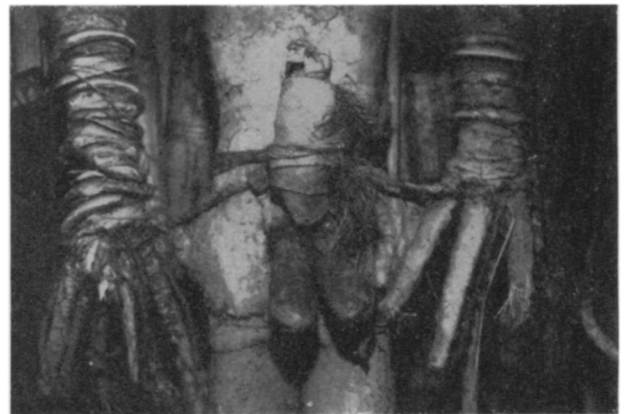


PLATE 22.



PLATE 23.



PLATE 24A.



PLATE 24B.

CAPTIONS TO PLATES (PENIS SHEATHS)

- PLATE 1. Plaited sheaths: Jos plateau and Verre (Pitt Rivers Museum Nos. 1920. 58.3, 1920. 58.4, 1921. 28.5).
- PLATE 2. Plaited sheath: Akwe Shavante (British Museum 1959 Am 10.28).
- PLATE 3. Basketry sheath: Zulu? (Alexander MacGregor Memorial Museum, Kimberley).
- PLATE 4. Gourd sheaths: Tapiro (British Museum 1939 Oc 52, 53).
- PLATE 5. Gourd sheath: Nguni (British Museum 1922 4–13 69).
- PLATE 6. Gourd sheaths: Telefomin (British Museum 1964 Oc 266, 268).
- PLATE 7. Aluminium sheaths: South Africa (British Museum 1954 Af 23).
- PLATE 8. Bamboo sheaths: Mimika (British Museum 1939 Oc 5.42, 52).
- PLATE 9. Bamboo sheath: Mimika (Museum of Arch. & Eth. Cambridge 24.1176 P).
- PLATE 10. Shell sheaths: Admiralty Islands (Pitt Rivers Museum Nos. 1921. 93.192, 1921. 93.193, 1931. 86.322, 1902. 4.3).
- PLATE 11. Skin and brass sheaths: Xhosa (Pitt Rivers Museum Nos. 1900. 77.13, 1900. 77.14, 1878. 1.77).
- PLATE 12. (A) Cocoon sheath: Pondon (Pitt Rivers Museum No. 1923. 34.56).
 (B) Wooden sheath: Zulu (Museum of Arch. & Eth. Cambridge 1876).
 (C) Wooden sheath: South Africa (Pitt Rivers Museum No. 1919. 29.98).
 (D) Skin sheath: South Africa (British Museum 59 9–8 53).
- PLATE 13. Horn sheath: Kaleri (British Museum 1964 Af 23.17).
- PLATE 14. Kynodesme: Greek, 5th century B.C. (British Museum 1898 7–16 6).
- PLATE 15. Mimika wearing a bamboo sheath (Cambridge Museum photo: Wollaston).
- PLATE 16. Basketry sheath: Zulu (British Museum SA 12).
- PLATE 17. Gourd sheath with brush: Namchi (Pitt Rivers Museum No. 1932. 59.15).
- PLATE 18. Horn and wooden sheath with cords: Hill Miri (Museum of Arch. & Eth. Cambridge 52 258 A/B).
- PLATE 19. Gourd sheath: Telefomin (photo: B. A. L. Cranstone).
- PLATE 20. Penis wrappers: New Caledonia (photo: Royal Anthropological Institute).
- PLATE 21. Penis wrappers: New Hebrides (Museum of Arch. & Eth. Cambridge 1916 126 34, 35, 36).
- PLATE 22. Penis wrapper on an effigy of the dead: Malekula (Pitt Rivers Museum No. 1900. 82.633).
- PLATE 23. Gourd sheaths with tassels: Bomvana (The Board and Director of the Alexander McGregor Memorial Museum and Duggan-Cronin Bantu Gallery, Kimberley).
- PLATE 24A, B. Wooden carving: Zulu (British Museum 1919 12–5 1).

PENIS SHEATHS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

The Curl Lecture 1969

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University College London

As far as I know the last lecture to be given on the topic of penis confinement took place in about 1537. Fabricius discussed 'infibulation before his class . . . , showed them a fibula and demonstrated before his pupils how, when it was applied, sexual intercourse became impossible' (Dingwall 1925: 44). I must make it clear that no such contortionist demonstration will be attempted here tonight. Instead I hope to discuss generally some of the problems involved in any study of material culture and at the same time I hope to explore various aspects of a particular example of human ingenuity—the penis sheath.¹

The study of material culture

As most of us are aware, the climate of anthropological opinion in this country has tended in the recent past towards fission rather than fusion; in more and more university departments the classic subjects making up an anthropological degree have drawn away from each other. In most cases it is the social anthropologists, preoccupied with their relationship to sociology, who are in the positions of power and to whom belong the burdens of directing future developments of academic anthropology. For a considerable time now the study of the material cultures of small-scale societies has been primarily confined to museum studies; the study of the material cultures of past peoples has become the field of archaeology, a subject which is now considered to have its own discipline and which has achieved independence in many universities in this country.

I do not want to spend time reviewing the history and causes of these developments but I do want to stress the general result of the present academic position. In remarkably few university departments of anthropology in Britain is it thought necessary to focus attention on the artefacts of the peoples whose social organisation, and occasionally whose physical make-up, are deemed essential knowledge for the undergraduate student. Museums of ethnography and archaeology, once the pride of some lucky university departments, have become academic embarrassments—their futures unclear and the space that they occupy coveted. In short, despite the works of such authors as Malinowski (e.g. 1922: 105-224; 1931) the study of material culture has in general become the poor handmaiden of other aspects of anthropology and its methods and aims are in some way considered less sophisticated than are those of modern social anthropology.

This present situation is, to my mind, as dangerous and as much in need of urgent review as any other in

the anthropological field. The essential difference between studies of past cultures and modern ethnographic ones is that for the former material culture is often the major data available for study, whereas for the latter material culture is just one aspect of what can be observed in the field or gathered from informants. One result of this has been for much of the ethnographic study of material culture to become concerned with ordering and morphological classification, whereas archaeological study, besides directing its attention more and more to field investigations, has made great progress in refining concepts and designing new analytical methods with which to squeeze all possible information from inanimate axes and potsherds. The rather static museum studies of material culture ignore much of the sophistication and detail of available anthropological data, while most social anthropologists nevertheless leave this area of investigation to their museum colleagues and concentrate instead on theoretical abstraction. In so doing, and by their tacit acceptance that archaeology is an independent discipline and no longer simply a particular method of approach dependent on excavation, anthropologists condemn the few remains that we have of many peoples to sterile disintegration in museums. As more and more 'primitive' societies become part of 'literate empires' so the social anthropologist is becoming more and more preoccupied with 'complex' societies, peasant communities and urbanisation. He will soon be leaving the one tangible evidence of 'primitive' societies to the curiosity of museum visitors, to art historians and to archaeologists; he will have failed in the task of analysing cultures as integrated economic, technological, social and political systems. The material recorded by ethnographers will simply have become more 'archaeological' material—more 'type fossils', analysable *only* by archaeological statistical methods; and the pendulum will have swung. As Clarke has recently put it: ' . . . with the current demise of ethnology in academic circles it is interesting to notice that archaeology is taking on many of the tasks and problems formerly left to the ethnologist' (Clarke 1968: 13). As it is inevitable that the small-scale societies will continue to disappear, so it is all the more important that they should be studied now. At the moment it is still possible to claim that to be a good prehistorian one must also be an anthropologist but in the future it may well be that to be an anthropologist, as opposed to a sociologist, one will have to be an archaeologist (e.g. Ucko 1968: 420; 1969: 264).

It is the major aim of this paper to suggest that at this time when social anthropologists are concerned

with redefining the aims of their subject it is vital that they should recognise the rightful place of studies of material culture within anthropology. To my mind the strange assumption that an expert on primitive pottery or weaving is somehow less of an anthropologist than the expert on plural societies is a dangerous and illfounded one, which holds out little hope for the future development of anthropology as an integrated academic subject. As I hope to show here, the study of human artefacts can act as a bridge between most other aspects of anthropology; in this sense it should be a central interest of any anthropological department. Any subject which can provide common ground for the varying and disparate interests of anthropologists, and which at the same time commands the interests of the public, must be considered invaluable at this time. No one can tell at the present moment where the various interests of sociology, human biology and archaeology will lead the integrative subject of anthropology, but a continued or increasing emphasis on the relation of environment to culture seems certain. A central basis in material culture from which all these interests can develop can only benefit the whole subject. To be central is often to be ignored and it is uniquely to the credit of the Royal Anthropological Institute that a lecture exists whose content is specifically decreed to be non-sociological and which is nevertheless sponsored by anthropologists.

In a recent article in *Man* it has been argued that the present lack of interest in material culture is primarily due to a change in fashion (Heider 1969: 379); I suggest, rather, that the social anthropologist's lack of interest in this subject is primarily due to his ignorance of what such studies are, or at least should be, all about. Classically, studies of material culture and primitive technology have been involved with several different aspects of man's adaptation to his environment, analysis of the processes of innovation and diffusion, and the understanding of the techniques employed in the manufacture of cultural artefacts. From here studies of material culture proceed to analysis of the function of the artefacts and/or classification of these artefacts, a classification based most usually on morphology but sometimes on function. Most active work by ethnographers on material culture has in the recent past been based on museum studies and their classifications have been primarily exercises in ordering material. Previously, however, and currently as far as the material culture of past populations is concerned, the primary aim of such classifications is to study distributions with a view to understanding culture history and culture contacts.

I make no apology for mentioning these methods and aims nor for considering them to be vital aspects of anthropological investigation. I will, however, seek to show in the context of penis sheaths that such analysis should lead to a consideration of a much wider range of anthropological topics. Before I

embark on detailed discussion of penis sheaths I should like to stress two particular points. First, that my aims in this paper are strictly limited; I wish primarily to indicate how wide and multifaceted any useful study of a human artefact must be. This limited aim almost inevitably implies that various parts of this paper will appear obvious and perhaps simplistic to different sections of its readers; I can only hope that the general picture resulting from a study of penis sheaths will be to some extent novel.

The second point that I would like to stress is that this study is not based on any new fieldwork, and the nature of the literature is such that much of the information which would be needed for reasonable analysis of myth or for reasonably based inductions regarding culture history simply does not exist. I will therefore be able to give little of the social, political or economic background which would be required for any satisfactory social anthropological study. There are large gaps in the literature and, furthermore, some of what does exist is contradictory even on quite specific points of fact. It is remarkable, for example, that Miklucho-Maclay (1878: 113) maintains that the inhabitants of Taui Island in the Admiralties urinate through a small hole in their penis shell, whereas Thilenius (1902: 129) claims that they are always removed for this purpose; similarly the explicit claim that the Unkia of New Guinea urinate through their penis gourds has been challenged because of the observation that not all the gourds used have the end cut off (Karius & Champion 1928: 95, 101).

Perhaps even more disturbing is the fact that the most detailed statements regarding social status and the wearing of particular sheath types are found in a recent popular book on New Guinea. It is said about an unspecified tribe in an 'unknown valley' that the women have exclusive control of the cultivation of gourds and that it is they who choose the gourds and fix them correctly on to the penis. These gourds 'must not be a fraction of an inch too long . . . the wives of the men who have the biggest gourds . . . swell with pride as they measure up their husband's against the lesser fry . . . I shall always remember the admiring glances of a young husband as his wife looked at him with that ambiguity common to all women, but here you could hardly tell whether he was admiring his . . . gourd or was gazing lovelornly into her eyes, for they were both in the same place. His gourd was so large that it extended to the face' (Davis 1969: 164-5). Almost every specific point in this account is contradicted in more serious literature. The deplorable state of much of the literature² can, I think, be largely explained by the lack of interest in material culture of many of the social anthropologists who have occasionally merely recorded the existence of such, to my mind, striking penial appendages. It is certainly clear that the literature on penis sheaths, despite its interest for those concerned with economic anthropology, with primitive art, with status organisation and with medical anthropology, is largely unknown. Another

of my aims is, therefore, to review and to attempt to order a large, scattered and confusing literature. The one positive aspect is the excellence of many of our museum collections which include a wide, although sadly neglected,³ variety of specimens of penis sheaths from different areas of the world.

Penis sheaths. The first important step is to define the area of investigation in this paper and, perhaps surprisingly, this is by no means an easy step to take; nor is it one without important consequences for it immediately brings to the fore a distinction to which I will return several times in this paper; the distinction between morphology and function. One dictionary definition of a sheath is that it confines something, in the context of this paper the *glans penis*; in this sense all clothing of the lower part of the body could be called a sheath but a second dictionary definition states that a sheath is a close-fitting cover. The starting point of this investigation will be a close fitting cover of the *glans penis*, but an immediate refinement must be acknowledged; not all sheaths are necessarily manufactured objects although the methods of fastening them must involve the use of an artefact. As will be seen later in some detail, some people 'sheath' the glans with the prepuce which is fastened, in many different ways, so as to confine the *glans penis* with a tight fitting cover. These practices, when they include manufactured artefacts securing the end of the prepuce, will all be included for analysis in this paper.

My initial starting point is thus primarily a non-morphological one, but one which depends on a particular function, sheathing the *glans penis*. That I am able to start from function is the virtue of dealing with ethnography; the prehistorian who studies material culture must, except in the most rare cases, start from a purely morphological basis. This is a most important point for, as Steward has argued (1954: 55–6), it is at the functional and not the morphological level that cross-cultural comparisons are at their most useful. Nevertheless it is important to realise that my narrow functional definition implies nothing with regard to the wider functional meaning (or meanings) of the particular practices. In other words although the function of all these artefacts is to confine the *glans penis*, this definition does not define the context of use. It can include everyday wear as well as special accoutrements which confine the *glans penis* during sexual intercourse. However this restricted functional definition does have several necessary morphological concomitants; the sheath must be shaped so as to cover the whole penis (i.e. it must be roughly cylindrical) or it must be shaped so as to fit directly on to the glans (i.e. globular, cubic or pyramidal), or it must be designed to fasten the end of the prepuce (i.e. clamp, ring, or thread). Arbitrarily, perhaps, all general covers, binding, painting or even tattooing⁴ of the pubic area which are without special elements designed especially to confine the glans or the whole penis, are omitted from this

enquiry.⁵ Thus shell plaques and even whole shells which serve simply as hangings in front of the penis are not included in this study for they do not conform to the whole meaning of my initial definition;⁶ shells into which the penis is actually placed are, of course, included.⁷ Possibly the main rationale for the exclusion of general pubic coverings and the inclusion only of techniques involving confinement of the *glans penis* is to introduce a further element into this study, namely the important distinction between penis and *glans penis* on the one hand and scrotum on the other. Whereas in many small-scale societies it is either the penis or the *glans penis* which is singled out for sheathing practices, the scrotum in the vast majority of cases is left unconfined and open to view.⁸ Clearly this further functional restriction has morphological implications for the main element under analysis here is a penis/*glans penis* cover, and specifically such. Inclusion of any scrotum covering is secondary, and only occurs when it forms part of a penis sheath.

Function and morphology. Recent argument by those studying material culture has centred on the problem of whether analysis should be based exclusively on function or morphology (e.g. Tippet 1968). To my mind such extreme positions are not required at the present time; material culture can be studied from two complementary starting points—first, as part of a larger cultural activity and second as a system of its own (see Clarke 1968: 649). The fact that this investigation starts from a functional basis with restricted morphological implications makes any morphological pattern which may emerge from cross-cultural investigation, whether synchronic or diachronic, all the more worthwhile and possibly significant (and this view is, I would maintain, valid despite the views of such authorities as Steward (1954: 54) who have over-simplified and over-stressed the superficial differences between morphology and function). If there is one thing which distinguishes the study of material culture from most other aspects of anthropological investigation, it is that its data are manufactured objects, the result of some technological process, and I therefore make no apology for insisting on the potential importance of morphological studies. The essential quality of material culture studies is that re-analysis is possible at all times; in other words, with changing attitudes and interests the basic material can be re-investigated at any time without the charge being levelled, so common in the social anthropological field, that the societies themselves will have changed considerably between the time of first recording and subsequent re-investigation. It is at this point that the artificiality of the present academic division between the study of present day and past material culture becomes evident, for the qualities of the material under consideration are exactly the same in both cases and the methodology and many of the aims coincide. Despite all the sophistication of modern analysis of prehistory the essential tenet of any material culture investigation is, and must be,

that the morphology of artefacts is a reality which reflects some cultural situation and that this level of social reality is no more or less meaningful than any other that may be discerned by analysis. It is the job of those who study material culture, whether in an ethnographic or in an archaeological context, to try to establish how social and cultural realities are reflected in the material evidence (see Deetz 1967: 7, 11, 52). To dismiss the importance of morphology by stressing that the same morphological club type may serve very different purposes (Tippett 1968: 76) is to ignore the main point and fascination of material culture studies. In the words of Clarke (1968: 120, 364) 'artefacts . . . embody information—congealed information about the orientation of a culture's perceptor, information about the actions integrated in their fabrication, information about their intent, and information about the "sensory" level of the culture's technology . . . artefacts represent coded information of great variety and capable of direct interpretation or misinterpretation by individuals both inside and outside the manufacturing culture . . . [Material] culture maps a real entity that really existed . . . that this entity is not identical to the historical, the political, the linguistic or racial entities does not make it the less real or important . . . the entities in all these fields are equally real, equally arbitrary and simply different' (and see also Ford 1954: 47). Morphological continuity or discontinuity will sometimes correspond to functional continuity (e.g. Tippett 1968) and discontinuity but not necessarily so; where such correspondence is not found the morphological status of the investigation is as deserving of the anthropologists' interest as is the functional situation. It is simply not good enough to dismiss the importance of morphological studies in the terms adopted recently by Tippett (1968: 25) who maintains that morphological classification, where it does not coincide with functional analysis, is simply a reflection of over-objectivity on the part of the modern western observer. In terms of the clubs, mentioned above, it is as pertinent to ask why the same club types are used in certain different contexts and why different club types are used in the same contexts, as it is to concentrate on function and context to the exclusion of morphology. It is for this reason that social anthropologists cannot simply dismiss the sophistication and results of some attempts at classifying material objects by maintaining that all this evidence could be obtained from observation of actual practice or from informants. Nor, for the same reason, can one simply maintain, despite all the archaeologists' classifications and typologies, that they can never reach a position more advanced than that from which the ethnographer starts his observation. These different levels of analysis inherent in the study of any material culture should not appear strange to those working in social anthropological fields.

Cross-cultural analysis. There are many people who do not clothe themselves at all; some are content with

a hip/waist girdle. Many peoples cover themselves in substantial artefacts, varying from the fully tailored outfit of the Eskimo or the robes of the Muslim Hausa to the few skins of the Tierra del Fuegians. Penis or glans confinement by means of some sort of sheathing device occurs among certain groups of people irrespective of the amount, or nature, of other clothing used by them. Thus, although the majority of peoples to be discussed wear nothing or little else besides the penis sheaths, some combine their use with headdress, loin cloth and elaborate clothing. Since European contact, several cases occur where their use accompanies the wearing of shirts and even, as will be seen later, of trousers. Despite several statements in the literature, the use of penis sheaths is not confined to New Guinea. In fact penis or glans sheaths are, or were, found also in Africa, various Pacific islands, North and South America and the Himalayas (see pl. 18) (e.g. Mills 1926: pl. 35; Haimendorf 1947: 110, 118, 120; 1955: pl. 29). From representations it appears that some forms of penis confinement were used in ancient Egypt, north and east Africa, Minoan Crete and the Cyclades; actual discoveries confirm their existence in ancient Egypt and suggest their possible use in some parts of the prehistoric Near East (see Hole *et al.* 1969: 232–3). Representations and literature show that they were in use in ancient Greece and in Etruscan and Roman Italy. In more modern times, the use of codpieces from the late fourteenth to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries is well known. Certain isolated cases of glans confinement may have existed among the modern Eskimo and the Japanese. Before looking at this distribution in some more detail, there is yet another important theoretical consideration to be kept in mind.

It has recently been claimed, admittedly in a rather different context, that it is to Lévi-Strauss's 'lasting credit that . . . it . . . is once again intellectually respectable to indulge in broad cross-cultural comparisons, especially in areas where sophisticated anthropologists have been evading comparison ever since the days of Sir James Frazer' (Leach 1967: xvi). Leach in this statement ignores the fact that cross-cultural comparisons have always been the mainstay of sophisticated studies of material culture and that they are implicit in the avowed aim of studies of material culture to show human reactions to different environmental and cultural situations. As I have tried to show elsewhere (Ucko 1969: 263–4), it is in the realm of cross-cultural comparisons that some serious divergence has begun to appear between the work of those studying modern material culture and those concerned with archaeological material culture. I have argued that in the context of studies of material culture, the comparative method focuses attention on a variety of cultural responses to what may appear to be similar situations. In such cases, and especially where one is dealing with a universal human predicament and one which allows only a limited range of

solutions, cross-cultural similarities and differences are at their most interesting, and at the same time are most difficult to interpret. I was prompted to make these observations in the context of burial rites, and it may appear far-fetched to argue the same with regard to glans sheathing but, in every society, whether or not it recognises physiological paternity, the penis must, at the very least, have served to define half of the population. For any society which does not simply hide the male organ beneath a garment covering the whole of the lower part of the body there are only a few possibilities left; to allow the penis to remain unencumbered in its natural state, to place it within some form of sheath, or to anchor it in some unnatural position. Where the penis is not allowed to hang loosely in its normal flaccid state the various possibilities for human ingenuity are limited and at the same time they are concerned with an area of the body which can be assumed to be of universal sexual significance. In other words, I am dealing with a situation where the common denominator is the penis/glans which can be assumed to be associated with ideas of virility (and all the symbolism and emotion which may go with this concept) and at the same time with an area of human activity which, for those people who do not simply leave the penis to its own devices, allows only limited ingenuity. It is exactly this situation of restricted solution to a universal human predicament which offers the challenge to so many studies of material culture. It should force such

studies to concentrate not only on gross morphological analysis but also on less obvious morphological distinctions (such as pre- and post-usage), on the details of the construction of the artefacts, as well as on such vital aspects as their social contexts, in order to distinguish between those similarities which may reflect cultural contact and those which may be the result of independent or convergent evolution.

I have spent considerable time in discussion of both the definition of the objects and practices to be discussed in this paper and the aims of material culture studies. I hope that from this starting point I have avoided the pitfalls against which Heider (1969: 380) has warned when discussing Dani attire; namely, the restrictive pressures involved in starting from a purely 'exclusive category'. As far as I am concerned, to start from limited functional-morphological criteria leaves open all options regarding subsequent method.

Distribution

We have seen that one of the established aims in studies of material culture is to investigate processes and results of cultural diffusion and innovation, and one of its main tools has been the use of distribution maps. Clearly I have not the time here to enter into the details of argument which make up the distributions that I have prepared and I must content myself with saying simply that these maps extend in several ways previous attempts to plot distributions of penis sheaths.⁹

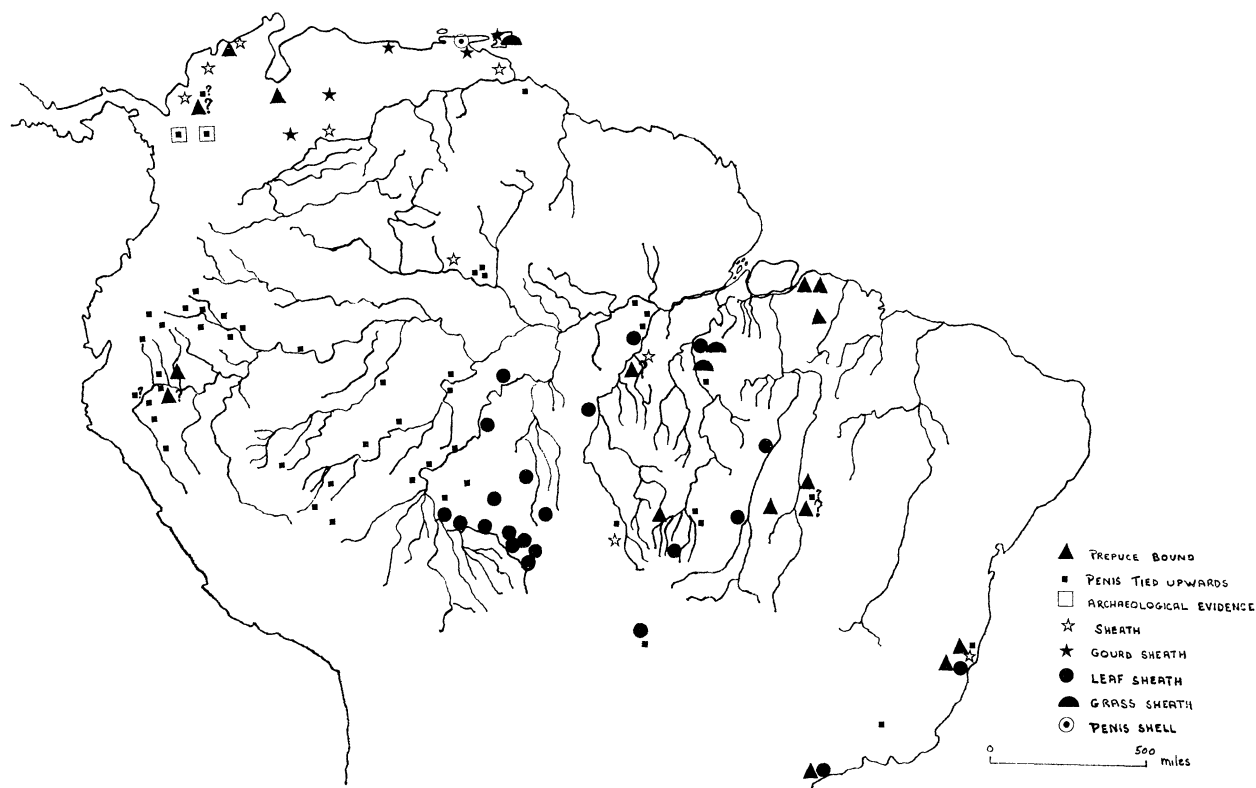


FIGURE 1.
Distribution of sheathing practices in South America.

South America

The cultural distribution in the Americas (fig. 1) of the practice of confining the *glans penis* is concentrated in the Amazonian basin and along the north coastal region of South America. In the vast majority of cases the South American practice consists of binding the prepuce over the glans and placing the penis erect under some form of belt; in a significant minority of cases some form of manufactured sheath is used; and among a few peoples the prepuce is tied over the glans and the penis is left in its natural flaccid position. As was said long ago by Friederici (1912: 155), the South American distributions of different ways of confining the glans penis overlap considerably; and, in general, sheathing which itself has been occasionally used to define a culture area, does not in fact conform very closely to culture areas which have been distinguished on quite different criteria. When we look at the materials used for the manufacture of sheaths we find a northern distribution for the use of gourd and the occasional grass example, and an eastern distribution (south of the Amazon) for the use of leaves and the occasional grass example. Nordenskiöld (1924: 148) had already observed this discontinuous distribution and had suggested that those tribes who now wear aprons had previously used penis sheaths or had tied the prepuce beyond the glans. The gaps in distribution (many of which cannot be ascribed to lack of recording) point the lesson that we must be cautious in assuming that this trait is particularly useful for assessing culture contacts; such gaps are found, for example, within the

mountainous areas of Peru which are characterised by the relatively widespread practice of prepuce tying (Steward & Métraux 1948: 571). All that can be said about this restricted South American distribution is that glans confinement is common in the mountainous areas, in areas of tropical forest and in various isolated tribal groups, and that this practice has a remarkably limited distribution in eastern Brazil. Most attempts to characterise particular tribal groups otherwise defined by language, on the basis of the absence or presence of glans confinement have been shown to be inadequate by more recent observation (e.g. Zerries's (1964: 120) now outdated claim that only one Ge tribe had such a practice). There are a few more specific suggestions concerned with the relationship between individual tribal groups rather than with general distribution. Polykrates (1962: 86-7) suggests some possible cultural affinity between the Kashiwana, the Parantintin and the Tupi, for they alone wear long manufactured sheaths of various vegetable fibres, and he draws attention to evidence that the Kashiwana formerly lived at the mouth of the Tapajoz and might therefore have been in contact with the Tupi. Similarly Caspar suggests cultural affinity between those Brazilian tribes of the Guapore and Mochado rivers who wear a particular distinctive leaf sheath (1952: 155; 1953: 209). Outside the mainland of South America, northwards to the Gulf of Mexico, the penis is occasionally bound upright under a belt. In North America the Mandans bound the prepuce over the glans with deer sinew at least for the performance of certain rites (see Catlin 1967: 58).¹⁰

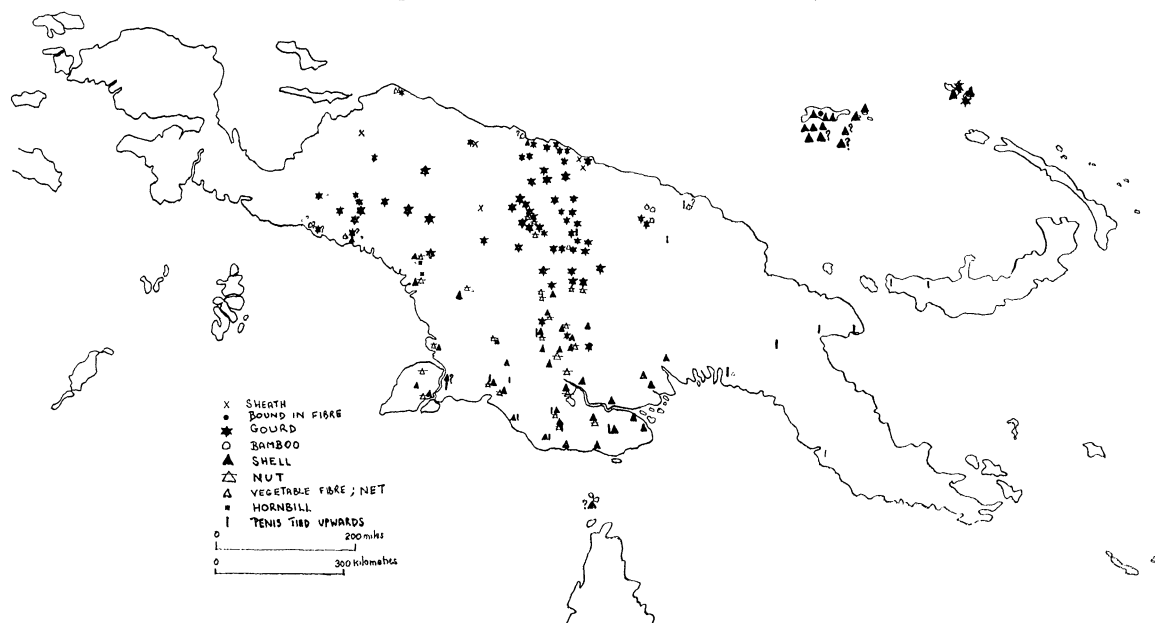


FIGURE 2.
Distribution of sheathing practices in New Guinea.

New Guinea

The practice of tying up the penis under a belt is also found widely scattered in New Guinea (fig. 2), extending further eastwards in New Guinea than any

other form of glans confinement. The best known of New Guinea methods of penis confinement is the one isolated by Graebner as part of his Oceanic

'totemic' complex (e.g. Graebner 1924: 49): the use of manufactured sheaths. Bamboo, and also nets, are restricted to a few isolated areas, whereas the use of nuts is widespread and scattered. Concentrations are evident in the use of shell sheaths on the south coast and along many of the south-draining rivers such as the Fly, Baliem and Digoel and in the use of gourds on the north coast, but almost exclusively in the Highlands. The distribution of the use of gourd sheaths is now known to be quite extensive from the April and Strickland rivers in the east to the Wayland mountains in the west.¹¹ Most authorities have correctly taken the use of the gourd sheath as a Highland trait and the use of some other form of penis concealment, especially shells, as a Lowland one; Le Roux (1948) and Reisenfeld (1946) identify particular areas as intermediate regions where gourds and shells, shells and nuts or gourds and net/aprons occur together. In general some authors have stressed the cultural continuity of the areas across which the use of a particular type of sheath is found

whereas, rather more convincingly, other authors have stressed the scattered nature of the present day distribution, have insisted on the speed of change of such practices, and have postulated previous culture areas whose identity is now disguised by changes in custom. Some authorities have focused on the details of sheathing practices, particular decorative devices and technological features such as the position of the opening into which the penis is inserted. These attempts have met with only limited success in characterising cultural areas, the most convincing being the identification of the coastal New Guinea Mimika peoples with the use of distinctive bamboo sheaths. Detailed analysis of bamboo sheath designs led Haddon and Layard (1916: 35) to isolate three different types of sheath whose geographical distribution is not well defined. A stone figure from the Huon peninsula with the representation of a figure with penis held upwards suggests that some of these practices may in the past have extended further eastwards (Neuhaus 1911: fig. 59, 1).

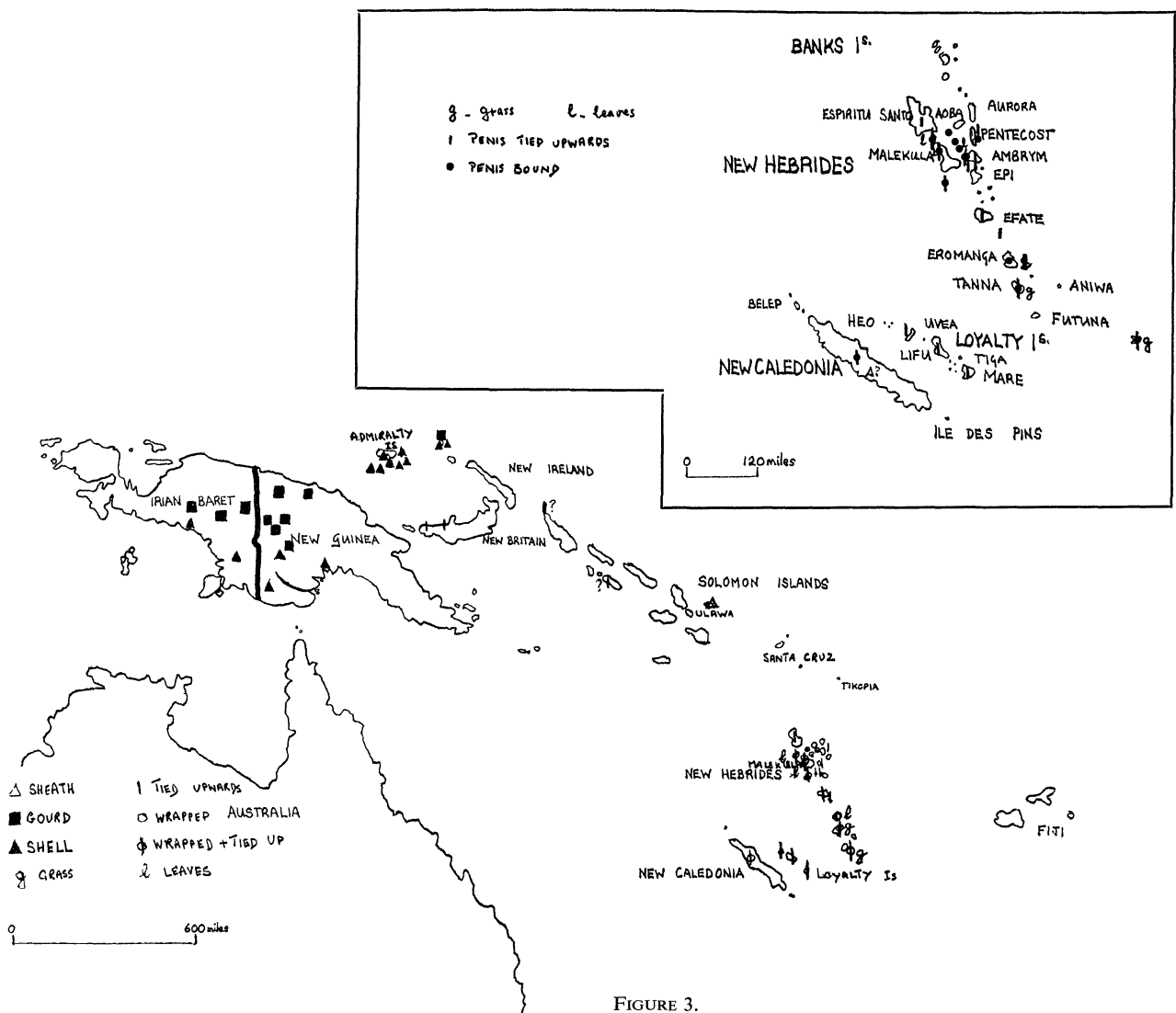


FIGURE 3.
Distribution of sheathing practices in the South West Pacific.

South-west Pacific

In the Gambier Islands and in several of the Marquesas the prepuce was tied beyond the glans and the penis allowed to hang naturally, a practice known from the South Americas but not from the south-west Pacific. Within the islands of the south-west Pacific (fig. 3) the distribution of penis confinement is strikingly discontinuous. Shell sheaths are worn in most of the Admiralty Islands, whereas New Britain and New Ireland, except apparently for very occasional tying up of the penis under the belt in the former, practise no penis confinement. With the probable exception of Ulawa Island no penis confinement exists in any of the Solomon Islands, Santa Cruz or Tikopia. Further south, however, many varied practices occur, particularly the penis tied up under the belt both with and without previous wrapping of the penis in different materials, and these practices are concentrated in the New Hebrides, the Loyalty Islands and New Caledonia. The majority of attempts to deduce culture history from practices of penis confinement have been concerned with this discontinuous Melanesian distribution and many suggestions have been made regarding the relation between sheathing and circumcision. The two main general explanations are those by Rivers (1914: 432-6) and Speiser (1934: 138-9), both making free use of postulated incursions of different peoples into the area. For Rivers some form of operation on the foreskin was an indigenous Polynesian practice; when the later Kava peoples came into the area they came without their own women. In order to be accepted by the indigenous women the Kava men had to be circumcised and yet they had a dread of exposing the glans; to neutralise the results of such exposure they adopted penis covers. Layard (1942: 478), in rejecting this explanation for the New Hebrides, nevertheless accepted the association between penis wrapper and incision/circumcision. According to Speiser nakedness was originally a Papuan trait whereas both clothing and circumcision derived from Melanesia; before circumcision was introduced the penis was allowed to hang freely. Speiser's two main tenets are 1) that when Melanesian circumcision spread into areas where loin cloths were worn the practice developed of placing the penis under the belt; and 2) when circumcision spread into areas without clothing the penis was placed either into a shell or into some sort of wrapper. To explain the whole distribution, however, Speiser had to postulate that in a certain few areas where circumcision was adopted, the penis was nevertheless left hanging; such areas of circumcision and nudity were, according to Speiser, marginal. But the complexity is still greater, for Speiser had to admit that in certain areas of nudity circumcision was rejected, and yet penis covers were adopted and, besides, he gave no explanation as to how a penis shell could be fastened onto a circumcised penis. Furthermore the distribution of penis confinement in this area shows a remarkable association between the use of manufactured sheaths and areas

formerly often called Papuan. Within so-called Melanesian areas we find three possibilities: either no practice of penis confinement exists, or the penis is occasionally bound up to a belt, or a penis wrapper is used. That the prepuce bound and held up to a waist belt also occurred in Polynesia is clear from classical Maori practice (e.g. Best 1940: 296; Biggs 1960: 15; Mead 1969: 37).

On the basis of certain particular similarities in penis covers several more specific theories were developed. Thus, despite differences in modes of attachment and materials, Speiser (1933: 189) deduced that diffusion to New Caledonia came from the north and not direct from Arue. The existence of penis sheaths throughout Malekula was taken by Deacon (1934: 10), although he distinguished different forms of penis wrappers, as evidence of the overall cultural identity of the island. For the whole region of the New Hebrides Deacon stresses that the custom of wearing a penis sheath is restricted to the islands with patrilineal descent, and he explained the current distribution in terms of various influxes of different peoples. At first the organisation of the islands was matrilineally based; under the influence of immigrants who practised incision and who wore penis sheaths the organisation changed to a patrilineal one. A further invasion occurred this time of a 'mat-skirt culture' which occupied matrilineal areas and did not extend very far southwards. However this mat-skirt culture did reach 'the coastal areas of Malekula, where although the man's penis sheath survived the fringed petticoat of the women gave place to the mat-skirt' (Deacon 1934: 706).

It is worth noting that none of these cultural reconstructions makes any reference to reports that either in the past or still today the Maoris of New Zealand, some groups in the Philippines, certain Japanese and the natives of Nias Island, west of Sumatra, all tied or tie the prepuce to cover the glans or tie the penis up to the belt.

Africa

Penis confinement in Africa (fig. 4) is restricted ethnographically to large areas of west Africa, many South African tribes¹² and some parts of the Congo (the apparent scattered distribution in the Congo is probably the result of inadequate recording). In the vast majority of cases the confinement takes the form of manufactured penis or glans sheaths. The literature deals with this African distribution in two rather different ways, either concentrating on local group or tribal affiliations or stressing the great antiquity of the African penis confinement trait and pointing out the major lines of development and distribution. In the local west African context interest has centred on showing how certain tribal groups, such as the Bafia in what is now East Cameroon are distinct from other groups within the same supposed culture areas (Tessmann 1934: 83). For the Bafia the suggestion is that they fall within the cultural influence of the

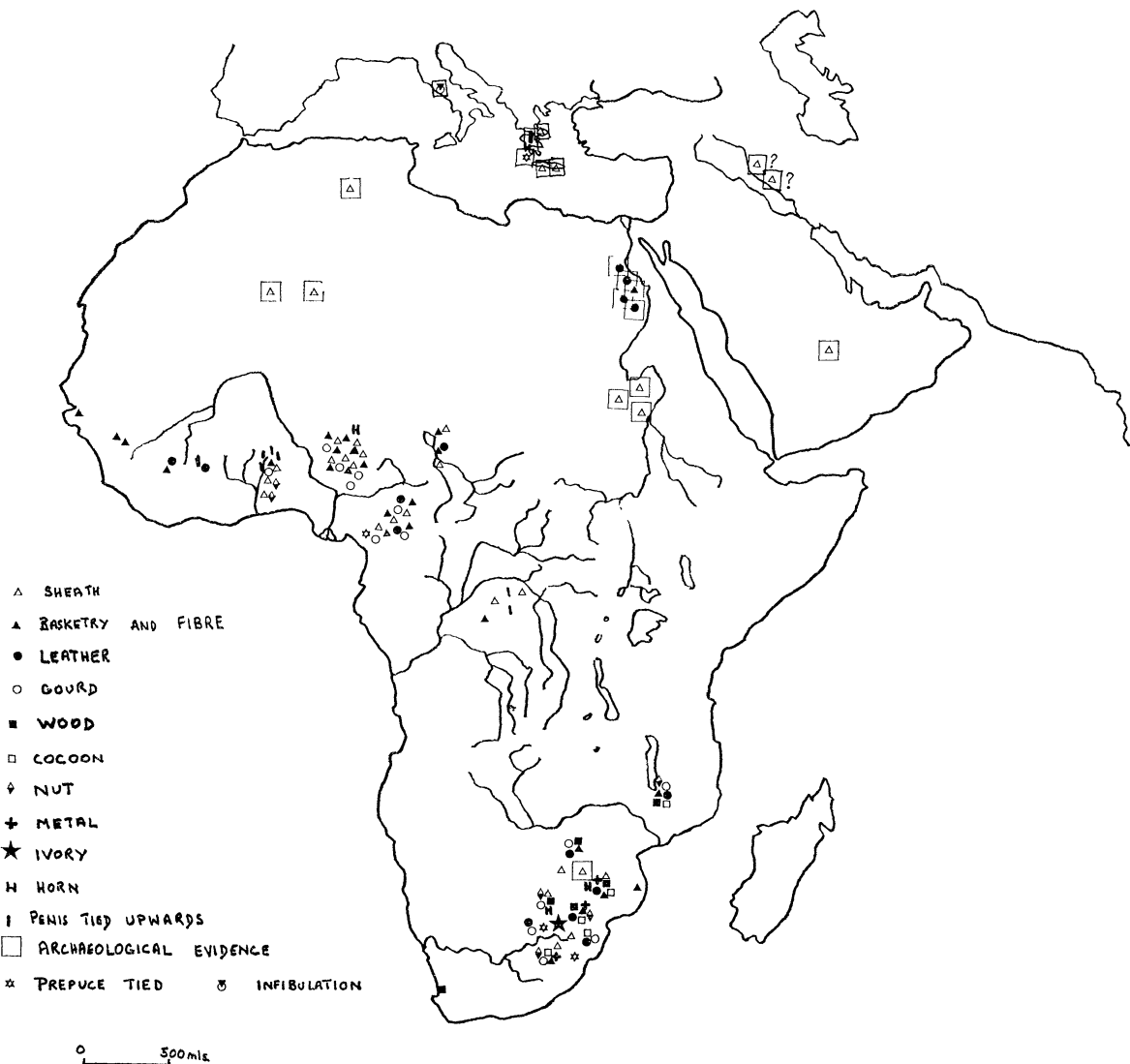


FIGURE 4.
Distribution of sheathing practices in Africa.

central Sudan, while the use of sheaths in Adamawa in Nigeria is accepted by many (e.g. Meek 1931: 378; 1925: 41) as showing an ancient connexion with the Plateau. Such observations are elaborated in two different ways which may appear somewhat contradictory; one line of argument accepts the custom of wearing penis sheaths as a mark of certain tribes such as the Chamba of Adamawa Province, the Guisiga of Northern Cameroon and the Zango Verre of Yibango, distinguishing them from surrounding tribes of otherwise similar cultural traditions. The other approach is to equate the use of sheaths with wide cultural or linguistic groupings; thus for northern Nigeria Meek (1925: 41) claims that all sheath wearers are semi-Bantu peoples, while those of the French Sudan are taken to belong to the Volta family. Following this line of argument the use of sheaths is taken as evidence of an ancient connexion between the Plateau Bantu

and the semi-Bantu. For the Bantu-speaking tribes of southern Africa the emphasis has been on connexions between specific tribal groups and the borrowing of different sheath types (defined morphologically) by one group from another. Frequently the suggestion is that tribal groups who originally had their own distinctive penis confinement practices eventually adopted a Zulu type of glans cover (e.g. Junod 1927: 95); but, unfortunately, this sequence of events in the majority of cases is difficult to authenticate in view of the wide variety of practices of the Zulu themselves and the confusion of terminology in the literature. The most elaborate scheme is that offered by Junod (1927: 626) for the Thonga who, it is suggested, may already have worn a cylindrical or conical glans cover made of plaited palm leaf (the *Mbaya*) in a pre-Bantu period. Later, until c. 1500, they may have continued to wear the same *mbaya*.

In the third period, from 1800 to 1820, Junod claims that they definitely wore the *mbaya* while, after 1820 (but see below for comments on this date), and until they adopted European dress they wore a polished round glans cover made of gourd or wood (the *shifado*) which Junod claims was derived from the Zulu.

Some suggestions have been made for Africa, as also for Melanesia, that circumcision and penis sheathing have a parallel distribution. More recent study, however, has shown that confinement of the penis/glans is found both amongst tribes who do practise circumcision and those who do not. No one has suggested for the African data, as they have for Melanesia, that this distribution was the result of partial adoption of practices introduced by incoming peoples.

Egypt

The wider interest in African sheaths has focused on the long antiquity of penis confinement in the African continent as well as its modern distribution. Penis sheaths of several forms are known from representations dating from the Pre- and Proto-Dynastic (before c. 3000 B.C.) periods of Egypt until at least the end of the Middle Kingdom, c. 1780 B.C. while the evidence of rock art from some stage of prehistory reveals similar practices in Algeria, Upper Egypt and Rhodesia (e.g. Flamend 1921: 82; Winkler 1938: 20; Lee & Woodhouse 1966: 115). There have been two major arguments concerning the antiquity of this practice. According to the first the similarities between the ancient and modern custom indicate the basically African nature of early Egyptian culture, an African basis which continued well into historic times (e.g. Junod 1927: 93, note 1; Luschan 1900: 505). The second view, which is by far the more popular, is that the wearing of a sheath in ancient times was a Libyan characteristic (e.g. Bates 1914: 122; Naville 1900: 68; Winkler 1938: 20). According to this view the Pre- and Proto-Dynastic representations are evidence of original Libyan contact (or even identity) with ancient Egyptians; later historic representations are in the majority of cases interpreted again as Libyans. This almost universal equation between the wearing of a penis sheath and the Libyan identity has led to several ingenious attempts at deciphering the meaning of several Proto-Dynastic ornamented palettes in terms of invading populations and the enslavement of indigenous peoples (Legge 1900: 125–39; 1909: 297, 300, 309). Recent re-analysis, however, of several of the historic representations has made it quite clear that many of the individuals shown wearing sheaths are in fact Egyptians (see e.g. Blackman 1914: 3; 1915: 19; Fischer 1961: 68, 74). Furthermore Elliot Smith's observation (1923: 83) that there was undeniable direct evidence for Pre-Dynastic Egyptian peoples themselves having worn penis sheaths has, until recently (Hölscher 1955: 37;

Ucko 1967: 351–3), been completely overlooked. Elliot Smith, himself, saw the penis sheath distribution as reflecting cultural continuity from Pre-Dynastic Egypt into historical times; from Egypt he considered the practice to have spread into Nubia and hence, after a considerable lapse of time, into east Africa. In some cases these two approaches have been reconciled, the ancient Libyans being considered as representatives of basic African culture and historic Egyptian representations of people wearing sheaths therefore being interpreted as depicting either Libyans or Nubians (see Fischer 1961: 74). The views of those who have stressed that the Egyptian sheath might have had a restricted function, such as for use in hunting (e.g. Fischer 1961: 68) or that the Libyan sheath might have served a quite different purpose from that of sheaths worn elsewhere (e.g. Bates 1914: 122) have been largely ignored. Suggestions of some kind of meaningful similarity between the sheaths of such diverse peoples as the Libyans, Pre- and Proto-Dynastic Egyptians, Minoans, Myceneans, modern Moba, modern Thonga and New Caledonians gained much more attention (e.g. Evans 1927: 20–1; Legge 1900: 133–5; 1909: 300; Luschan 1900: 505; 1901: 197–200, and see Pendlebury 1939: 268).

Interpretation of distribution

At the beginning of this paper I made no apologies for the continued interest in distinguishing independent invention from convergent and parallel evolution and from diffusion. I must stress, however, that the correct distinction between these processes is vital and only when this has been satisfactorily accomplished can historical inferences and deductions be usefully undertaken. I would suggest that these distinctions were sadly missing from the works of the majority of authors reviewed so far. In the first place, we are confronted with a highly discontinuous distribution, worldwide but with the trait separated by vast distances and enormous time spans, a distribution which may lend itself to explanation in terms of independent evolution, assuming that the same solution has been found to satisfy a basic need for protection which has arisen at different times and in different areas (e.g. Chauvet 1936: 99) (and see Luschan 1901: 117–200). Secondly, we have a practice which can be considered specific and unusual enough to suggest cultural connexions. This last view is supported not only by numerous archaeologists who have postulated some cultural connexions between ancient Egypt (with or without the Libyans), Minoan Crete and ancient Greece, on the basis of representations of the sheathing practice, but also by some ethnologists who, in perhaps the most extreme form, have seen in this distribution (excepting the Himalayas (plate 18) about which they were apparently unaware) evidence of the diffusion of a negro trait not only across Africa from the western Sudan but also from Africa to Melanesia, New Guinea and South America (Jeffreys 1968: 305–17).

In other words, I insist on the continuing importance of the old familiar questions posed by at least the cultural and physical anthropologists; how similar do traits have to be to constitute possible evidence of past contact and how can one distinguish such similarities from those derived from other factors such as the situation to be dealt with, or the chance appearance of similar traits. And I insist too on the importance of Forde's emphasis on the specific similarity of form or content as opposed to what in this context we can call general morphological or sociological parallelism (Forde 1959: 199). In studies of material culture (and I am not at all sure that this does not equally apply to other studies of anthropological interest) it is clear that different facets of activity may develop or remain relatively static independently of each other (e.g. Ucko 1969: 263). This is an important and complex point for it can be argued with equal logic that on the one hand it is the specific non-generalised parallel between cultures that is the really meaningful clue to cultural contact (Ucko & Rosenfeld 1967: 153; and see Jeffreys 1968: 315–16) and on the other hand that it is the number of similar traits shared by different cultures that can distinguish between homology and analogy (Balfour 1936: 11; and see Jeffreys 1968: 309), or it can be argued that both kinds of similarities have their own value (e.g. Ucko & Rosenfeld 1967: 153–8).

Following Rowe (1965–6: 336), we may go a stage further and say that even in situations where the details of form or content may be similar we need not even then postulate diffusion. But we are then, and this is the important point, confronted with a crucial question—why have two or more peoples, in widely dispersed areas or at widely different dates, adopted the same solution to a particular problem or why have they responded in the same particular way to a specific situation. If we rephrase these possibilities with reference to penis confinement practices, we may say that to reject any diffusionist explanation of the detailed similarities in the sheathing practices of different peoples is to say that we have eliminated any cases of convergent evolution, and that we accept the likelihood of processes of independent invention, with the added rider that the range of possible penis confinement practices is, by definition, limited. Furthermore we must acknowledge, as has been stated before, that to confine the penis by some sheathing practice is to choose only one of several different possible responses to the problem set by the 'shame-display' situation, which may or may not include the use of some form of manufactured sheathing device.

There are several aspects of penis confinement which must therefore be investigated in order to assess the usefulness of these possible lines of interpretation. We may consider these features under several major headings: evidence for the relative stability of the trait; details of techniques of manufacture and methods of attachment; overt explanation of the trait by the users; and contexts of its use, each of which will help us to form an opinion about the nature of this practice. To

take one of the more convincing of the suggestions reviewed above, before we can assess the likelihood of the Kashuiana, the Parantintin and the Tupi having previously been in contact because all these groups wear sheaths we must attempt in several different ways to evaluate how close the similar practice of sheathing really is amongst these peoples. In this specific case, Polykrates has started from an overall morphological similarity based primarily on size and has, rightly or wrongly, taken this similarity as being more significant than other differences in morphology, the use of different vegetable materials in their construction and the very different techniques involved: the Parantintin folding some twelve *aruma* leaves on top of each other (Nimuendaju 1924: 254–5) to form conical tubes to hang down from the penis, the Kashuiana plaiting their sheaths with an opening in the side for the insertion of the penis which is then attached by cords round the waist, and between the legs and up across the buttocks (Polykrates 1962: 86–7).

Relative stability

Within the context of the relative stability of the trait we may distinguish 1) the attitude of the peoples concerned, 2) the speed of change associated with the trait, and 3) the variety of practices within a tribe or culture area.

Attitudes towards sheaths. It is, I think, relevant to realise that my insistence on the importance of studying human artefacts at the beginning of this paper was not solely the view of an outside observer wishing to study culture history but is also an attitude held by many of the peoples concerned. Their interest in material objects is of course partly to be explained in terms of time, labour and economics (see below) but it is also a reflection of the fact that they themselves often find artefacts the most convenient distinctive signs of a person's tribal or cultural allegiance. The Apapocuva of Brazil have a creation myth in which are related the exploits of some brutish but not particularly terrifying creatures and their relationship to the twins born of God. One of these creatures disturbs the twins while they are out hunting and is thereafter at the receiving end of numerous of the twins' practical jokes. Normally this creature wears his penis tied up to the body with a long hip cord which he removes while bathing. One day the twins put pepper into the water and the more the creature washes his penis the more it burns when tied up to the belt. Finally he runs away and falls into the everlasting abyss. The Apapocuva do not themselves tie up the penis and Nimuendaju (1914: 320) explains this part of the creation myth as a means of making fun of those nearby tribes who do practice this form of penis confinement, amongst whom are found their own arch enemies.

The use of some form of penis confinement as a distinctive tribal sign is also reported from other parts of the world. The use of a sheath by the chief of the Nioka of the Congo is taken by them as distinguishing

them from other Pende (Sousberghe 1954: 216–19). In New Guinea the situation seems to vary from people to people; there are several reports of native porters collapsing in laughter at the varying methods of penis confinement encountered during the journey when accompanying travellers in New Guinea. In some areas of New Guinea the distinction is not simply between those who do and those who do not wear some form of penis confinement; different groups of Dani are distinctively recognisable according to the width and length of their penis sheaths as well as by the angles at which they are held (Heider 1969: 386). Similarly, the Simori never have the sheath decorated with plumes or held up to the stomach, while the Dem never have the sheath protruding straight forwards with the point curving upwards (Le Roux 1948: 143). In several cases in New Guinea different districts are characterised by the wearing of different types of sheath: some may be decorated, others plain; some may be elongated and others egg-shaped; some curved, some peanut in shape and size (Willey 1966: 185).

A typical New Guinea situation is described by Reche (1913: 75–6); as he journeyed along the foothills of the Sepik river, at first the majority of the people in most villages were naked, then in one particular village the majority of people were clothed in a variety of sheaths and eventually in the mountains more or less everyone wore gourds. Le Roux (1948: 143) summarises the position for New Guinea by stressing that there is some regularity in the fashions of penis confinement in each tribe, but that these fashions often overlap. There is some suggestion in the literature that this picture may also be true for other areas apart from New Guinea; thus in different parts of New Caledonia, penis wrappers vary greatly in length, from the short wrapper bound up to the stomach to wrappers of some 60 cm. long (Glaumont 1889: 102). Much the same picture of regional differentiation emerges from a study of sixteenth and seventeenth century European codpieces whose morphology and methods of attachment varied from country to country (e.g. Binder 1958: 200–1 and illustrations).

Speed of change. In certain areas of regular visiting and trading in New Guinea, such as Seka and the Humboldt Bay, no surprise is evinced by varying customs; the former people wear sheaths and their Humboldt Bay visitors wear nothing and yet they are given the kind of welcome due to prestigious neighbours. There are strong indications in the literature that it is particularly in areas of intensive trading or migrant labour that, as might have been expected, the use of penis confinement has undergone most modification; it is known that in Leitere sheaths used to be worn but that this custom has been discontinued for the past eighty years or so. This information is based on direct observation, but some very different criteria have been used for deducing the length of time that the custom of penis confinement has been in use, and clearly some of these are much more reliable than

others. There is of course no problem about assessing the speed of change associated with penis confinement when the assessment is based upon directly observed evidence, except that most of these observations tend to be derived from trading centres and are therefore subject to special conditions of strong external influence. In this way we know of the changes of custom both at Leitere and in the general Humboldt Bay region of New Guinea. We also know from direct observation of the decrease of the use of penis shells on the Pacific Islands of Pak, Lou and Paluan. In certain areas of Malekula a far greater number of wrappers had names than were actually used. From this Deacon (1934: 341) deduced that the custom of wrapping the penis was breaking down, a conclusion which is supported by the fact that there has been acute depopulation in Malekula. We have similar observations from Africa, for Meek (1931: 504) reports that when he visited the Kugama the wearing of sheaths was then in the process of becoming obsolete. Occasionally it is even possible to assign rough dates to different forms of sheaths; the last South African Thonga *mbaya* was seen about 1894, having been still common among the northern clans until about 1835 (Junod 1927a: 516; 1927b: 93), while Zulu aluminium sheaths cannot have been introduced before c. 1890. There are also the first reports of European voyagers, giving us some idea of the longevity of penis confinement practices (e.g. Vasco da Gama's observation at the end of the fifteenth century that the inhabitants around St Helena's Bay wore sheaths (Ley 1947: 4)). In Venezuela also some direct observation records that gold and pearl decorated sheaths were greatly desired by the Spaniards and that the natives took to wearing gourds (Friederici 1912: 156; Nordenskiöld 1924: 148). We can also accept the antiquity of tying up the penis in South America as this practice is shown on certain excavated plaques and on statues from San Augustin. Becher (1955: 144) associates this with the continued existence of such practices in some very isolated tribes. Perhaps the least convincing of these criteria for assessing change is that based on an ancient Egyptian representation of a female wearing a sheath, from which it is deduced that already by the Vth Dynasty (c. 2550–2400 B.C.) the real meaning of what must originally have been an actual male practice had been forgotten (Borchardt 1913: 13).

Some further criteria have been used to assess changes in penis confinement practices and must surely be more questionable. In the African context, Tessmann (1934: 83–5, 88) argues from traditional history for the exceptionally swift changes of style of penis confinement, for the Bafia of the Cameroon who now wear leaf sheaths claim that they originally wore skin coverings and later adopted gourd sheaths from neighbouring tribes, the latter still wearing gourd or wood sheaths. For the Moba and Gourma of west Africa, Froelich (1949: 101) argues that the sheath must be an archaic form of dress for its use is confined to initiation rites, ignoring the possibility that it might

always have been confined to such occasions. For the Chamba Lekon of Nigeria as well as for the Pacific island of Emirau it has been argued that because it is only the old men who wear sheaths it can be assumed that the custom is dying out, ignoring the possibility that this practice might be defined by, or might define, social status and age (Meek 1931: 378; Chinnery n.d.: 131). The restriction of the use of shell sheaths for dancing and at times of war in the Admiralty Islands has been taken as evidence of its relatively recent foreign introduction. The basic problems of deducing former practice from restricted usage is not only that the use may always have been restricted but that such restriction can as well be interpreted as reflecting recent introduction. We have already noticed this explanation suggested in the case of the Admiralty Islands and we find it again for the peoples of the Yawin valley in New Guinea where only few males wear a penis confinement (of shell or coconut); it has been argued (Wirz 1928: 145) that this reflects recent introduction of the practice from the Marind-Anim. Whatever the shortcomings of all the deductions which are not based on recorded direct observation or on datable events, there is no doubt of the considerable evidence which suggests that practices of penis confinement are not particularly stable. As Friederici (1912: 153) maintained long ago (although assuming that this practice had once formed a single complex) this trait cannot be assumed to be static and, over time and distance, numerous changes and differences can be assumed and shown to have occurred.

Variety of practice. Although we have seen that certain tribes and cultural areas are distinguished by specific penis confinement practices, this in no way implies that each tribe always has just one sheathing practice. Sheaths may be used in certain situations only, as for example during certain dances on the island of Manus where the men don white shells and the boys practice wearing small fruit shell coverings, or there may be several types of sheaths used by the same people. In the central New Hebrides, apart from Erromanga, the penis is wrapped in grass, in tapa or in cotton cloth or is placed within a horn or even possibly within a bamboo sheath. The island of Pentecost has penis wrappers in the south but no penis confinement in the west of the island. Variety of penis confinement practices are also found within the same tribe and at the same locality; thus in New Guinea the Telefolmin normally wear either various types of gourds or large nuts, the latter being rarer and more greatly valued (Villeminot & Villeminot 1964: 255), but the occasional individual is to be encountered wearing instead a toothpaste container (Simpson 1963: 363), a Kodak film container or a cut-open sardine tin (personal communication, B. A. L. Cranstone). Also in New Guinea Toro men are sometimes nude, sometimes nude except for a waist belt, sometimes clothed with a waist belt with a shell suspended over the flank and sometimes with a belt with the shell hiding the

penis which is tucked under the belt (Seligman & Strong 1906: 228). Amongst the Mimika people both shell and bamboo are used, while amongst the Marind-Anim the variety is even greater, some having the penis under the waist belt, some wearing a shell sheath and some with a shell 'phallocrypt' (see note 6). A story from the Dani reflects this situation of variety within a broad framework of conformity. Mathiessen (1963: 135) recounts that while a woman was asleep a man quickly assaulted her, and she, once she realised that it was not her husband, shouted for help. By the time help came, the man had gone leaving behind only his sheath. The village was very anxious to trace the culprit, but as all males wore elongated gourds, some straight and some with curled tips with or without dangling fur decorations, they had little real hope of succeeding.

In Africa also the literature hints at variety both intra-tribal and between groups of basically similar peoples. Thus among the Thonga the length of sheaths varies from 1 to 2 ft according to taste (Bryant 1929: 291), while all the Verre of northern Nigeria except for those who call themselves the Zango wear sheaths. In South America, each clan and subclan of the Bororo owns a particular sheath decoration, but amongst different groups of Bororo are found quite different penis confinement practices; some place the penis within a leaf cuff, some place the penis under a waist belt, and some are reported as wearing rings.

With this picture in mind it is unlikely that a tribe within which such variety is the norm should hold strong views about the necessity of sheathing the penis in a particular and standardised way. This is a picture which again suggests fluidity and a possibility of both personal and group variety and experimentation.

Techniques of manufacture

It is now necessary to move on to the consideration of the details of technological construction of the different methods of penis confinement and in this way to add a further dimension to the question whether we are in fact dealing with very similar practices and objects or whether we may, in some cases at least, suspect that we are dealing with processes of convergent evolution. We may broadly distinguish two aspects to the technology of sheathing devices: first the manufacture of the sheaths themselves, and second, the methods of attaching them to the penis, *glans penis*, or prepuce.

Vegetable fibres. Our initial approach must again be cross-cultural taking as the starting point the materials from which the sheaths are made. Most information in the literature is concerned with the use of leaves and with gourds, while for several of the other materials used, we know almost nothing of the details of their manufacture. The vast majority of sheaths made of vegetable fibres, most commonly leaves or raffia/grass, are plaited (plate 1), a few exceptional cases being made of woven basketry

(plate 3). The plaiting varies greatly from society to society some sheaths being made from narrow strips of palm leaf or raffia and others of wide leaves of banana, *aruma*, etc. Morphological variation within the category of fibre sheaths is vast, both in shape and size. These sheaths may be long and straight, short and straight or in distinctive shapes resembling knee-shaped pipes, boxes, or envelopes, the particular form used varying according to cultural preference and the methods of attachment to the penis/glans. In some cases the plaiting used, for example for penis wrappers in Malekula (e.g. Layard 1942: 42) is very intricate while in other cases, such as the Akwe-Shavante (plate 2) and many other South American peoples, the men make their own everyday sheaths by simply folding leaves over each other to form a cone (e.g. Krause 1911: 396).

The most detailed account of the techniques of manufacture of different leaf sheaths as well as the identity of the manufacturers is found in Tessmann's (1934: 83-94) account of the Bafia of the Cameroons who wear a multiplicity of sheath forms each with its own distinctive name. New styles of sheaths are continually being introduced and, once approved, are quickly copied by others. Any Bafia can make his own normal, everyday, sheath from strips of palm leaves, the sheaths being as broad as they are long. Boys make their own net-like sheaths or obtain good specimens from their fathers. Only specialist Bafia can make the type of leaf sheath which has two points; these forms are made with an awl of a type used in many other contexts and are constructed from large palm leaves which have had the middle spine removed by a knife during folding. Each palm strip is made into one sheath which has its lower ends cut obliquely, is then rolled and the point pushed through the slit in the roll while the front end is pushed into shape to make the second point which is kept in place by stitching; stitching also extends all along the edge of the rolled sheath. Only certain master craftsmen amongst the Bafia can make certain rare types of sheaths and those worn during festivals, all of which are covered with snake or lizard skin and are characterised by their rounded off corners and the use of decorative sewing, colouring and the sophisticated inclusion of decorative additions such as feathers and claws. The Zulu are one of the rare peoples to make use of basketry sheaths which are made by minor craftsmen of woven strips of banana stalks fashioned into very lightweight spherical box shapes (Bryant 1949: 135, 408).

There is also good information available about the manufacture of the palm leaf cuffs of the Bororo of Brazil which are worn for the first time during initiation rites. There is some confusion whether it is the women or the novices' grandparents or uncles who collect the appropriate leaves for the manufacture of the cuffs (see Lévi-Strauss 1964: 52-4) but it seems likely that it is the novice's ritual father who actually manufactures the sheath and places it on the novice's

penis. As has already been stated, Bororo cuffs vary in their decoration according to the particular clan or subclan of the wearer but this applies only to festival occasions when a band of 8-16 cm. length decorated with feathers or down and often painted is allowed to hang freely. Normally Bororo sheaths are cut short without such appendages, made simply by folding and rolling a palm leaf of c. 50 cm. on itself to form a conical funnel with one end open (Lévi-Strauss 1936: 294-6; Karsten 1926a: 150-2; Steinen 1894: 193; cp. Fric & Radin 1906: 392).

In Malekula where sheaths are again adopted in initiation rites it is the woman, the mothers of the novices, who are apparently responsible for their plaiting which follows the longitudinal stripping of banana leaves while leaving enough of the central fibre to withstand some wear (see Layard 1942: 42). It is noticeable from this review that the morphological variety allowed by this particular material, as well as the techniques employed in their shaping, is vast.

Gourds. Sheaths made from gourds may be of very varying diameters and lengths; sometimes two gourds may be fitted together to gain the desired length. Haddon & Layard (1916: 8) report a New Guinea Utkwa case where one gourd of 24 cm. length is inserted into another of 13.5 cm. to form a sheath of 34.5 cm. with a 4 cm. diameter at the base and 1 cm. at the tip. In some museum specimens from the New Guinea Tapiro the joining of two gourds together under a binding allows the tip of the sheath to have some flexibility (plate 4). Some New Guinea tribes use sheaths which are open-ended; others, such as the Pesegem and Dani use sheaths which are closed either naturally or with the use of such materials as a wad of the fur from a cuscus or other marsupial's tail, wads of bark, some kind of fibre stopper, or even a hornbill beak (e.g. Heider 1969: 387; Kooijman 1962: 48; Nouhuys 1913: 15). As will be seen, gourd sheaths are attached in different ways to the penis and/or scrotum¹³ and/or to the waist and these different methods require different features on the sheaths themselves: perforations at different places through the gourd or encircling bands. Among the pygmies in the Goliath mountains of New Guinea, for example, the long sheaths have rattan strips round the middle or top of the gourds to which are attached cords (e.g. Brock 1911: 821-3; Kock 1912). In the Star Mountains the bases of the gourds are strengthened with small plaited rattan or pandanus leaf bands (e.g. Kooijman 1962: 18). Several attempts exist to devise morphological classifications of New Guinea gourd sheaths but these are hardly convincing. Sande (1907: 92), for example, distinguished between egg shaped and pear shaped examples, the former large and heavy with closed blunt ends and the latter lighter with rather wider openings in the middle of the gourd. Normally these two sheath types are decorated with black engravings.

The shapes of the sheaths depend partly on the methods of gourd cultivation used. Amongst the

Dani of New Guinea a long and straight gourd is obtained by attaching a stone weight to the growing gourd; a curved or curving gourd results from bending and lashing it while growing; and a particular light coloured gourd is obtained by protecting it from sunlight by wrapping the growing gourd in inner banana bark (Heider 1969: 396). In the Dani case each man may possess a wardrobe of several sizes and shapes (Gardner & Heider 1969: 28; Heider 1969: 386–7), the variety consisting, as was reflected in the story of the rape of the sleeping woman, not only in the length of the sheath (a typical short example being *c.* 10–20 cm. long, and a typical long straight example being *c.* 60 cm. long) but also in the absence or presence of curled tip as well as in the sheath diameter (Heider 1969: 386). The basic manufacturing processes are the same for all gourd wearers. Once the elongated fruit of the gourd creeper has been grown into the correct shape, the thick end of the fruit is cut off using stone or bamboo knives and some of the flesh is scooped out. The gourd is then roasted for some 15 minutes in order to harden the shell and to make the flesh soft. More flesh is then taken out together with reheating, a process which lasts for some 25 minutes, the outer skin of the fruit is scraped off and the gourd often sun-dried, sometimes to achieve a distinctive yellow colour (e.g. Kock 1912); the fruit is then dried for several nights near to a fire in order to harden it (Harrer 1963: 124; Heider 1969: 386; Pospisil 1963a: 286–7; Le Roux 1948: 138). The gourd is then often polished with fats or sweat and various attachments added. Not all New Guinea tribes train their gourds into special shapes (Le Roux 1948: 139). Unlike the Dani and Kapauku who appear to have a specially elaborate manufacturing process whereby the gourd vines are trained to climb up a special framework above the ground (Heider 1969: 386; Pospisil 1963a: 286), the Tifalmin do not appear to train their gourds at all. It may be that there is here a connexion with their unique method of splitting the wider end of the gourd down one side, pushing the broken sides inside each other and binding it to the required diameter with a tight plaited band of pandanus, one end of which is anchored in the split (plate 6). The resulting sheaths have basal diameters of 2.7–3.0 cm. and are all characterised by an angled profile at the base. South African gourd sheaths are usually bulbous and much smaller than those of New Guinea. Amongst the Nguni and Zulu, the gourds are often decorated with burnt incisions and are provided with protrusions, often curved, at the basal ends (plate 5). Amongst several tribes tassels of varying materials hang from the gourd sheaths (plate 23).

Bamboo. The distinctive short bamboo sheaths of the Mimika of New Guinea (plates 8a, 8b) require particular techniques for their manufacture and yet their typological characteristics are only partially determined by the material and the techniques used. In the detailed analyses by Haddon and

Layard (1916: 34) the cylinders used are said to vary from 10–19 cm. long and from 3.4–4.3 cm. diameter. One end of the cylinder is cut above a node and the other below a node, so that the upper end of the sheath is naturally bounded by a node whose septum is usually artificially pierced by a hole of 1.1–1.8 cm. diameter. Below the node is situated the scar of the leaf growth which is found alternately on one side and the other in the growing bamboo and which, with only the rarest of exceptions, is also the side of the bamboo cylinder in which is cut the opening for the insertion of the penis. On the other side of the cylinder a peak is usually carved as well as one or more lozenges whereas the ring surrounding this part of the whole bamboo cylinder is natural. On almost all of the Mimika bamboo sheaths are found decorative incisions, some apparently made by the application of hot metal tools to achieve a brownish colour standing out against the natural yellow colour of the bamboo and some cut out with cold tools. Morphological variety is expressed both in the shapes of the holes for insertion of the penis (divided into several types by Haddon & Layard (1916: 35)) and in the general shape of the whole sheath which varies from squat and cylindrical (Fischer's cylinder-tongue types (1913: 48)) to cut-outs in the form of the human body with legs and feet (Fischer's two appendage legs type (1913: 49)). Experiments have shown that the whole time involved in the manufacture of even the most detailed and complex of these sheaths may have involved no more than 30 or 40 minutes, for bamboo is easy to work by slicing when cut with the grain and once the outer skin is penetrated the nodes are easy to pierce.

Aluminium. Only a short time is involved in the manufacture of some other sheaths however unlikely this may at first sight appear to be. Museum collections in Britain contain a considerable number of sheaths made from aluminium which were apparently worn by the Zulu (and possibly several other South African tribes). These artefacts were spun, their rims being bent severely backwards with the application of heat and a hole being punched after the manufacture and polishing of the object through the closed end of the sheath. It is not known whether these particular sheaths were made locally in South Africa from imported sheets of aluminium or whether, as claimed at least in certain sale catalogues (e.g. Stevens Sale Catalogue 1924), they were manufactured 'by an enterprising German trader and sold to the natives' (Lot 357). What does seem clear (Personal communication, Alcan Research and Development) is that these objects could have been made by anyone who had already acquired even the most rudimentary skills of metal spinning, and that the whole process would have been a matter of only some ten minutes. It is noteworthy that these distinctive sheaths, never mentioned in any ethnographic literature, are found in two main morphological types (plate 7) the first pear-shaped and the second spherical with

grooved cylindrical opening, both types with apertures of 2.4–2.7 cm. diameter.

Shells. On some of the Admiralty Islands the shells used as penis sheaths have the internal convolutions broken but the apertures are left untouched or occasionally slightly enlarged, apparently to about finger-width (Miklucho-Maclay 1878: 113). Several examples are incised with black-filled linear decorations (e.g. Moseley 1876: 397; Nevermann 1934: 109) (plate 10). The shells used by some Mimika are similarly worked and in addition have two small perforations to take an attachment to a waist belt (Wollaston 1921: 113–14). The shells used by Toro men are apparently not worked in any way and the Toro do not trade them but fetch them themselves from between the Bensbach and Morehead rivers (Seligman & Strong 1906: 228). The shells used in the Kiwai district of New Guinea are obtained from the mouth of the Binaturi river and from the Torres Straits (Landtman 1933: 33). It is interesting to note that shell penis sheaths are not only known from the primitive world, for one example appears in Mabuse's (c. 1516) picture of Neptune and Amphitrite. Interestingly enough this sheath covers the penis and glans but not the scrotum, and is without parallel, contemporary representations being shown either nude or covered with a leaf or some form of cloth (see Segord 1923: 77; Heidrich 1910: fig. 124).

Miscellaneous. Of the other materials used for the manufacture of different kinds of sheaths there is virtually no detail regarding their construction. Perhaps the strangest and simplest of all sheaths is that made from cocoons (plate 12a) of butterfly or moth worn by the Bhaca, the Zulu, the Nguni and Pondo of South Africa (e.g. Kohler 1933: 11; Tooke 1962: 81). Sheaths made from ivory, wood, coconut or fruit shell were carved into a variety of shapes, some possibly skeuomorphs of gourd and basketry forms (plates 12b, 12c). Skin and leather sheaths, from antelope, ox or goat, are quite common among several South African tribes. Amongst the Pondo all skin-working was undertaken by old men (Hunter 1961: 101). The Xhosa construct distinctive sheaths consisting of an elongated skin or leather bag to cover the penis with a thin strip extending through a shank of brass or twisted wire (plate 11). One Zulu type of skin sheath with sewn seam seems again to be skeuomorphic (plate 12d), greatly resembling the normal Zulu basketry sheath. Skin or leather sheaths were also used in ancient Egypt (see below). The Kaleri of Nigeria make some of their sheaths from long curling horns and perforate them for attachment cords (plate 13).

In certain parts of South America the foreskin is not simply tied by the boy himself or by his mother, nor simply placed under a waist belt, but is held in a wooden suspensor of some 6–7 cm. long which is attached to the belt (Zerries 1964: 120). Carved

wooden penis holders are also found in parts of New Guinea (e.g. Sorenson & Gajdusek 1966: 159).

Fibula. We must also note the use of metal rings. Amongst certain groups of Congolese Ba-Pende these form the bases of raffia sheaths (Sousberghe 1954: 214–19). In Roman Europe (and possibly earlier also) metal rings were inserted through holes in the prepuce. The nature of Roman 'fibula' is open to discussion. There is certainly no doubt that some men wore metal rings covering the prepuce (Celsus VII, 25(3); Juvenal, VI, 379) but there is some evidence that a Roman fibula might also refer to a metal sheath (see Martial XI, 75) or even a metal clasp of unknown shape. The latter evidence is based on an epigram by Martial (VII, 82) which describes Menophil wearing a particularly large fibula which, unfortunately for him, fell off during some athletic enterprise and revealed him to be circumcised. It is clear from this account that Menophil, being no doubt Jewish, was unable to wear a normal ring fibula as he could not fasten it over or through his prepuce and, as a fraudulent Jew, he became the subject of satire (see Dingwall 1925).

Economics. There have been several hints in the previous review of the possible economic importance of sheath manufacture. For several peoples it is clear that sheaths were made domestically; for example, a Swazi boy's penis cover is made for him and given to him by his father (Marwick 1940: 153), but we have also encountered mention of full-time and part-time craftsmen as well as the trading of pubic shells (see Papuan Annual Report 1924–5, 1926: 44). We can also note that several New Guinea gourd and bamboo specimens were carefully mended (plate 4) by stitching or lashing with bast string across the break (and see Sande 1907: 438; Fischer 1913: 48). For the Dani it is reported that if the tip of the sheath is broken, the end is carefully closed with a wedge or the sheath is adapted for use in a shorter form. 'If the base is broken, the gourd will be replaced, but the broken pieces put to the side for possible future use' (Heider 1969: 386–7). That the mending of sheaths is not confined to New Guinea is shown by a mended example in the British Museum (No. 1951 Af. 12.77) from the Kaleri of Nigeria. It could be argued that to mend a sheath might imply no more than the existence of a favourite article of clothing but it is also worthwhile, as Le Roux has suggested (1948: 139), considering that there may also be economic factors influencing these practices. In parts of South Africa droughts and extreme sun-scorching are often responsible for the failure of gourd germination, and this is reflected in the refusal to part with gourd sheaths even to traders offering high rewards (Louw 1938: 63). The literature concerning the economic importance of penis confinement equipment is virtually non-existent, the outstanding exception being Pospisil's account of the Kapauku of New Guinea (Pospisil 1963a). From this account we learn that penis sheath gourds are grown in plots scattered through different gardens on the valley floor; on the other hand amongst

the Dani it appears that the gourds are grown in gardens in or near the village compounds (Heider 1969: 386; Gardner & Heider 1969: 28). Amongst the Kapauku the area of gourd cultivation is small and this crop has little significance for general crop rotation; as compared with banana and sugar cane cultivation its significance is minimal, the area specially planted with gourds being 0.014 per cent. of the total area under cultivation (Pospisil 1963a: table 13, 297). The sowing of the gourds is undertaken by both males and females, whereas responsibility for weeding rests with the women. Only the males select the gourds and decide which are suitable for penis sheathing and it is also the men who are exclusively concerned with all stages of their manufacture (Pospisil 1963a: 286). Kapauku sheaths are owned individually and never lent (Pospisil 1963a: 294, 349). Amongst the Dani, however, every male has his own extensive wardrobe and visitors may be given sheaths of particular shapes (Heider 1969: 387). As it ages the Kapauku gourd sheath acquires polish and an orange colour, both features being considered desirable qualities, and the life span of a gourd sheath is six months (Pospisil 1963a: 379). Kapauku gourd sheath manufacture must be considered a specialist activity, for half of the adult males had never made either a sheath or the rattan rings which encircle them (Pospisil 1963a: 299). At the same time the gourd sheath was one of the five most frequently traded objects. Within eight months some forty-six raw sheaths were traded in and out of one village. Thirteen sheaths were imported from other villages, five from kin and eight from strangers. Twenty-nine sheaths were exported from the same village, six to kin and twenty-three to strangers living in the Kamu valley. Five sheaths were sold to members of the same village, at a higher price than those to be obtained by import, and nine sheaths were given away as gifts (Pospisil 1963a: 347). In terms of general village income, therefore, the import and export of gourd penis sheaths has some considerable interest. It is also interesting to note that, as Pospisil says (1963a: 379) 'as in Western society, the expenditures for female costumes are painfully higher than those of the male'. Only with a detailed recording such as that carried out by Pospisil of all exchanges relevant to even the most apparently insignificant material objects can any meaningful picture of general economic activity be obtained.

Methods of attachment

It is clear that the morphology of the various sheath types will depend to a major extent not only on the techniques employed in their manufacture but also on their methods of attachment to the body. These methods may themselves have important consequences, for they will affect how readily such sheaths may be removed and the permanence or otherwise of such equipment may influence a people's own practice and hence bear some relationship to its economic

significance. Methods of attachment will also influence the angles at which the sheaths are worn, a distinction which we have already seen to be sometimes equated with a people's own cultural identity. These attachments may also have medical consequences and therefore be significant when we come to discuss the functions of these sheaths and they may also find reflection in some works of art (see below).

Kynodesme. When the prepuce is to act as a sheath of the *glans penis* the simplest way of obtaining this is to bind the end of the prepuce over the glans, a practice we have already encountered in various North and South American tribes. This method also existed in ancient Greece where the cord for tying the prepuce was referred to as a *kynodesme* and is shown on several Greek vase paintings (plate 14) and Etruscan statuettes (e.g. British Museum No. BR 526; see Dingwall 1925; Stieda 1902; Hovorka 1893: 135-8 for other examples). A *kynodesme* must be removed for urination and copulation (see Stoll 1908: 464). Amongst the Coyabi of Brazil these are the only times when the foreskin is untied (Nimuendaju 1948a: 308) whereas among the Kaschibo of Peru the thread is changed every ten days or so (Tessmann 1930: 129). The wearing of a *kynodesme* of course does not in itself imply whether the penis should hang or be held vertical; both penis positions are found quite commonly. Amongst the Karaja of Brazil it is reported that the foreskin is tied so tightly that the penis is partly forced back into the scrotum which has therefore a three-pronged look about it with one prong protruding obliquely upwards (Krause 1911: 294). For the Karaja, Koenigswald (1908: 223) has argued that this custom leads to an artificial lengthening of the prepuce,¹⁴ while Steinen claims (1894: 193) for the Kulisehu of Brazil that there is a marked shortening of the penis as a result of this practice.

Infibulation. The prepuce, as we have already seen, may also be fastened over the glans by means of a ring or clasp referred to in antiquity as a fibula. Celsus (VII, 25(3)) describes how infibulation was performed in the first century A.D., a practice confirmed by several Roman statues shown wearing rings. The prepuce was drawn forward and marks made on either side to show how far the prepuce could retract without revealing the glans. In cases where the glans was uncovered, holes were made at the places marked and threads inserted through them. When the hole has healed sufficiently, the thread was removed and a light fibula inserted in its place. Dingwall (1925: 58) records an episode said to date from 1822 to show the continued use of the fibula. Apparently a patient consulted a doctor Petroz; sometime previously the patient had fallen in love with a Portuguese woman with whom he lived for several years. He gradually discovered that she was exceedingly jealous. 'One morning before rising he suddenly felt a sharp prick in the region of the prepuce, and on making an examination he discovered to his amazement that he had been infibulated with a neat little gold clasp which

had passed through the foreskin, closed quickly by means of a spring, and could only be opened by a little key which he found in the possession of the woman by his side . . . he yielded to her entreaties and consented to wear the clasp, which was of course removed as occasion required. To his surprise one morning however he found that she had slipped a second one by the side of the first. . . . This continued for four to five years, till owing to their constant removal and reattachment, the state of his membrane was such that he was compelled to seek medical relief.' It seems from this account that infibulation with a clasp, and the same has been argued for the ring infibulation in antiquity (Stoll 1908: 494), allowed urination while preventing intercourse.

Waist belt. When the penis is to be held in a vertical position and the glans sheathed, the foreskin is often pulled over the glans and jammed under a hip or waist belt. In some cases this may involve quite a struggle: amongst the Marind-Anim the waist belt under which the prepuce is held must be so tight that it can only be put on with a great amount of wriggling, the greasing of the buttocks and the help of four other people (Baal 1966: 157). It has been claimed (e.g. Dingwall 1925), although the supporting evidence is not known, that this practice may also greatly elongate the prepuce. Amongst several other people, however, the penis is only placed under the girdle from time to time (see W. New Guinea Expedition 1904-5, 1908); amongst the Tugere of New Guinea only when they happen to meet a woman (Sande 1907: 91), and amongst the Jiravo of Peru, who normally wear loin-cloths but who also carry the necessary girdle around with them, only when they swim (Karsten 1935: 453).

In cases where the glans or penis is confined by being placed inside a manufactured sheath, the method of attachment may consist either 1) of jamming the prepuce, or scrotal skin, or organ into the sheath, 2) of placing a wrapper around the organ, or 3) of fastening the sheath to the body by means of one or more cords. In cases when it is the prepuce that is jammed into the sheath this can be seen as an alternative method for fastening the prepuce in such a way that it sheaths the glans (see Beidelman 1966: 397). The particular method chosen will greatly influence not only the ease of removal of the sheath for such necessities as urination but also the angle at which the penis and sheath are held.

Frictional adhesion. There are various different ways of achieving adhesion by the first method, the most common depending primarily on the smallness of the hole into which the prepuce and/or penis is inserted. From study of museum specimens it can be said that the diameters of these holes appear to be strikingly uniform according to sheath type and thus can be said to characterise particular sheath-wearing peoples. Whether these measurements reflect any physical differences in the penis sizes of different populations cannot, at this time, be established, but some observers (e.g. Miklucho-Mackay 1878: 114-15)

have commented on supposed differences of this kind. It is relevant to note that in modern Western sheathing practices the standard diameter of the sheath aperture is 3.5 cm., this having been reduced from some 6-7.5 cm. diameter in the eighteenth century to ensure that the contraceptive remains in place at least during detumescence; meanwhile the stretching qualities of the sheaths have of course been improved (personal communication, E. C. Corderoy, London Rubber Industries Ltd). The same principle of frictional adhesion still demands a small sheath aperture. In any case the closeness of the fit between penis and sheath aperture is clear from accounts describing the insertion of the penis into the sheath among several scattered New Guinea peoples who do so with the aid of a thin stick or spatula, made sometimes from pig's tusk, more or less as a shoe horn is used in Europe today; the spatula, being considered an essential accessory to the sheath, is worn in the hair for easy accessibility (Chinnery n.d.: 51; Friederici 1912: 155; Kelm 1966: 160; Sande 1907: 92). There is contradictory evidence regarding the results of this first method of attaching sheaths, some authors stressing that sheaths nevertheless easily drop off, others maintaining that they are so firmly fixed in place that (in New Guinea) the wearers are free to jump and dance (e.g. Sande 1907: 93), and others stressing that for South African tribes a projecting metal shank (see plate 11) facilitates removal of the sheath (Barrow 1801: 213). Friederici (1912: 155) records a journey he made in New Guinea during which he noted that the sheaths became loosened when crossing water and regularly became filled. He describes how the sheaths had to be repeatedly taken off, emptied and replaced with the aid of a spatula, fresh leaves having been placed around the opening of the sheath. At each stop on a particular march, the spatula was taken out of the hair and a toilette performed. This reference to the effect of water on the fit of the sheath has been noted elsewhere, and the facts of their becoming easily filled with water is echoed from observations in South America (Nimuendaju 1924: 254). In the Admiralty Islands where shells are only worn during the war dance the attachment was obviously very tight indeed, for in the dance the penis swings upwards, to left and to right in a circle (Nevermann 1934: 111). The Taui islanders always carry their penis shells about in a small bag on the chest or threaded on a cord over the shoulder; on other Admiralty Islands they are carried in special net bags or on cords round various parts of the body (Nevermann 1934: 102, 111). To put on the shell sheath the foreskin is pulled over the glans and is clamped into the narrow aperture of the shell so that it nips the penis just behind the glans (Thilenius 1903: 129; Moseley 1876: 397). Nevermann (1934: 108) reports some variation in this practice for some males manage to get more of the penis actually into the shell whereas one individual, with an abnormally long penis, only inserted the foreskin.

The physical consequences of wearing tight-fitting sheaths are rather obscure. We have already noted that conflicting evidence regarding the need of their removal for urination (see p. 28), but Thilenius (1903: 129–30) suggests that to wear shell sheaths for a long time results in a partial paralysis of the bladder muscles and he describes various attempts to urinate with them on. Different authors vary in their estimates of how much compression of the penis is involved in wearing a penis shell, but several (e.g. Thilenius 1903: 129; Reclus 1879: 197) maintain that the penis becomes either flattened and/or elongated by the weight of the shell. In one particular New Guinea case, the wearing of gourd sheaths is claimed to have resulted in a great elongation of the foreskin, sometimes to twice its original length (Zuid-West Nieuw-Guinea-Expeditie 1904–5, 1908). There are also conflicting reports about the use of green leaves to protect the penis from the sharp edges of tight-fitting sheaths (e.g. Finsch 1914: 325; Sande 1907: 93). For the Admiralty Islands, Moseley (1876: 379) remarks on the supposed flattening of the glans, the general swelling of the penis, the impossibility of erection while such a sheath is worn and the painful sharp edges of the shell aperture. In support of some of these observations there is evidence in the Admiralty Islands of ulcerations of the penis caused by pushing it into the narrow shell opening. During some war dances men remove their penis shells from time to time, turning their backs to the crowd, apparently because of the pain of wearing them. Nevermann (1934: 110) also records the observation made by Kramer of one man having great difficulty in removing his penis shell after a dance, finally succeeding by jumping into the water. Much the same sort of observation exists for the Lawo of New Guinea who are said to have inflamed penis tips, chaffed skin and generally enlarged penes, all caused by the pressure of their gourd sheaths (Neuhauss 1911: 197).

The distinctive Mimika bamboo sheaths also depend on the closeness of their fit and they are so designed that they can only be put on in one standard way with the result that they are always worn vertically (plate 15). The penis is inserted about three-quarters along the way of the cylinder shaft into a small hole of 2·6 to 4 cm. diameter which has either been cut in the side of the cylinder or is a continuation of the half cylinder. The prepuce is then pulled far forwards to penetrate a hole of 1·2 to 1·8 cm. diameter pierced through the node at the lower end of the cylinder, and the penis is thus held in flaccid position without any further attachment of the sheath to the body. Both the cut-out peak and the burnt and cut-out linear decorations are therefore visible; in the case of those cut into human shape the figures are worn upside down. A few exceptional specimens do not possess the normal pierced node; in one example in the University Museum at Cambridge (plate 9) the node is simply pierced by a small hole through which is threaded a knotted fibre, a device which could

perhaps have served to allow the circumcised to wear this type of sheath.

Jamming of the prepuce or penis through a narrow sheath aperture is also the basis of several African sheathing practices. The Zulu basketry sheath dangles at the end of the penis, held in position by the prepuce which has been forced through a hole of 1·6–2·5 cm. diameter (see Bryant 1949: 134). Many of the more typical South African basketry forms have a short cord running from the closed end of the sheath up to a hanging pubic covering (plate 16), a feature which may well explain the holes punched in the aluminium sheaths. Frobenius (1913: 322 sqq.) describes the putting on of the basketry sheaths of the Tamberama of Togo; in this case the prepuce, which Frobenius claims to be exceptionally long, is first wetted with saliva and the penis is then pushed back into the scrotum. The freed foreskin is placed in the sheath aperture, the penis is released and 'like a bolt or spring-loaded corkstopper' it jerks forward and forces the wet foreskin far into the sheath in which it clings. The skin near the scrotum is hard against the sheath, thus keeping the prepuce and penis vertical in the sheath. This form of sheath is suitable only for the uncircumcised, but even so they fall off fairly easily. Much the same method of inserting the penis into the sheath is followed by the Namchi of the Volta Republic; according to Muraz (1932: 104) the penis is forced back into the skin of the scrotum and then allowed to spring into the sheath when released, a method which secures it firmly enough to hold it in place while walking. But the Namchi are unique in their method of placing the penis into its sheath, for they provide it with a protective fibre brush which surrounds it during its insertion (e.g. Leiris 1934: 66, note 3) (plate 17). The Bafia of East Cameroon, however, simply press the penis, claimed to be particularly short, into a grass sheath, with or without the foreskin pulled over the glans depending on whether the wearer is circumcised or not. Tessman (1934: 85) records that the success of the method is greater for those who are not circumcised but that these sheaths, which of course have to be removed for urination, often fall off when walking in long grass and the penis is then covered with a temporary tube of leaf. The plaited sheaths (see plate 1) worn by the different tribes of the Jos Plateau in Nigeria are dampened at the edges and given a slight twist after they are put on (Meek 1925: 41).

The same problems of keeping sheaths both secure and comfortable confronted the Parantintin of Brazil who, exceptionally for the American continent, wore long manufactured sheaths made of leaves. These were made of some twelve leaves joined together to form a long cylinder of 25–40 cm. Although the Parantintin carefully selected smooth green leaves for this purpose and folded their borders so that they would be smooth and not hurt the skin, it is reported that youths wearing sheaths for the first time were incommoded by their new confinement and that the

sheaths caused sores on the tip of the penis (Nimuendaju 1924: 255). According to Freitas (1926: 68) to keep the sheaths securely attached the circumference of the prepuce was inflamed with the use of ants' teeth. Before use the sheaths were in the form of a rectangular prism, but once the whole penis was inserted they adjusted to the skin to become cylindrical (Nimuendaju 1924: 254–5). They were removed for bathing and urination, a removal which could only be achieved when the cotton threads attaching the sheath to the penis are broken or untied (e.g. Nimuendaju 1924: 254; 1948b: 286).

The penis cuffs of the Bororo of Brazil are attached by pulling the foreskin through the sheath opening (Lévi-Strauss 1936: 294–6), a practice claimed by some (Steinen 1894: 193) to cause a certain shortening of the penis length. The simple Akwe Shavante leaf sheath is supposed to be worn more or less continuously, except for urination and copulation, even while bathing. It is made moist in the mouth and is then pulled over the folds of the prepuce which have been drawn over the glans. However the difficulties in anchoring the sheath in this way are reflected by the Akwe-Shavante practice of employing small boys during initiation races especially to pick up the sheaths which inevitably fall off during any athletic activities (Maybury-Lewis 1967: 106). Amongst the Kayapo very similar sheaths also often fall off in public (personal communication, Terence Turner).

The Tupari of Brazil adopt a slightly different method of attaching their sheaths, a method which nevertheless still depends on frictional adherence. As with the Karaja of Brazil (see p. 43), the penis is pushed back into the sub-cutaneous tissue of the pubis so that it gives the impress of a third testicle in the upper part of the scrotum. But in this case, the penis, even when walking or dancing, is permanently concealed by surrounding tissue, except when it is pushed out for urination or copulation. A fold of skin above the orifice is then squeezed between a strip at the back of the palm-leaf sheath and the main body of the sheath. This method, also, causes irritation of the skin; many Tupari, when they first adopt sheaths complain of the pain and intermittently adopt the practice of tying the prepuce instead of using their sheaths (Caspar 1952: 155; 1953: 207–9).

Even when sheaths are attached to the glans/prepuce/penis by friction this does not at all imply that they inevitably hang freely at the end of the penis. Thus in certain parts of New Guinea, for example, shells and nuts are perforated to hold strings which run either to a belt or directly round the waist (e.g. Murray 1918: 41), thus allowing the penis to be held in any position. Similar methods are attested for several South African tribes (e.g. Barrow 1801: 213), such as the Xhosa whose penis stalls are drawn up to the level of the waist band by means of a string (Bryant 1949: 135). However, as has been seen in the case of the Mimika, methods of attachment by friction may anchor the penis in a certain position through the

sheath being jammed against the body (see plate 15). Similarly, the weight of the sheath may determine the position of the penis. Thus the weight of Sande's egg-shaped gourd type (see p. 40) forces the sharp end of the sheath forward so that the blunt end is supported behind and below the root of the penis right up against the scrotum, whereas the pear-shaped type is worn vertically (Sande 1907: 92). In these cases, as also for most of the other examples relying on a firm fit of the penis in the sheath, erection of the penis is more or less ruled out, for erection involves not only a change in the angle of the organ, but also an increase in its width and approximate doubling of its length, whatever its original dimensions (Morris 1969: 106; Masters & Johnson 1966: 192).

Cords. The method of tying the sheath to various parts of the body determines the angles at which the penis and sheath are held. In New Guinea such attachment is achieved by fastening a cord either through holes made into the nut, shell or gourd sheath itself or under one or two bands encircling the base, top, or middle of the sheath. Such cords are fastened to different parts of the body, round the scrotum (or one testicle) waist, or shoulders (see Heider 1969: 387; Pospisil 1963a: 273). This method is also found outside New Guinea (see plate 18), for in one case reported among the Zaunde of East Cameroon the sheath is said to be so long that it has to be attached by a cord around the neck (Junger 1926: 107). Normally in New Guinea these attachments ensure that the gourd sheaths can easily be loosened and adjusted by moving the rattan or pandanus bands up or down the sheath (e.g. Neuhauss 1911: 147; Le Roux 1948: 143–4). The Pesegem, for example, have the gourd sheath resting on the scrotum at angles of 30° to 70° to the vertical, held in position by a band of twisted bark which is attached to the base of the gourd and runs round the hips (Nouhuys 1913: 14). In other New Guinea examples some gourd sheaths are so attached that they protrude horizontally, vertically or even downwards (plate 19) (Le Roux 1948: 140). Amongst some New Guinea peoples these adjustable sheaths are removed at night but amongst others such as the Pesegem they are worn in vertical positions while sleeping (Nouhuys 1913: 15; Le Roux 1948: 144).

Wrappers. We have seen that the technique of tying the prepuce beyond the glans does not in itself predetermine whether the penis is held vertically or not. The same is true for the wearing of penis wrappers. In the Tanna Islands for example, such wrappers may reach some 44 cm. in length with a basal diameter of c. 5 cm. wound round the root of the penis, which is then held up in a waist band (Somerville 1894: 368). In New Caledonia (plate 20) such thick wrappers, with or without a second decoratively tied cloth, are sometimes allowed to hang freely (Speiser 1934: 138; 1919: 184–5; 1933: 189; Sarasin 1929: 156) and are sometimes attached to a string round the neck (see

Cameron 1964: 229). There may, however, still be problems of anchoring the wrapper securely to the body; in Malekula the foreskin is slit longitudinally and rolled back so that it heals in thick ridges and therefore acts as an anchor for the wrapper (Somerville 1894: 368). When put on after circumcision rites, the wrapper is often lined with a dressing of medicated soft leaves (Layard 1942: 510). Such wrappers can apparently be removed without losing their original form (Sarasin 1929: 156). For Malekula, Layard records (1942: 42, 477) that the wrappers, made of banana leaf, are held vertically and tucked in and from behind a waist belt and that they are only removed for urination, performed in secrecy, or for washing, which is carried out while under water. In other cases it is reported that urination takes place with the wrapper still attached: '... nor do they untie it when they want to make water, but piss through all and when done shake off what drops may hang to the coat' (see Cameron 1964: 229).

Only in the case of the Pende of the Congo do we know of an example where the sheath, sometimes used together with paralysing drugs, is so designed never to be removed once put on. In one Pende group a metal ring is placed directly on the penis behind the glans to which is attached a piece of cloth onto which is sewn a short raffia sheath, bell-shaped at the end of the sexual organ. Urination takes place through a small hole at the end of the sheath (Sousberghe 1954: 215).

Archaeological evidence. There are special problems confronting the study of sheathing practices of ancient Egypt, the prehistoric Cyclades (e.g. Zervos 1959: 253), the prehistoric Near East (e.g. Ucko 1968: 359) and those cultures only known from their rock art (e.g. Anati 1968: 75–6; Winkler 1938; 1939), for it is remarkably difficult to interpret the significance of many of the representations. With the exception of the evidence from Egypt which includes not only representations but also pre-dynastic burials from Naga-ed-Dêr and a particular New Kingdom text, all that can be said is that sheaths were worn, without being able to specify the types of sheaths or how they were put on and attached to the body.

Egypt. This review of the Egyptian evidence at least can start with direct evidence, for some fifty adult males were buried at Naga-ed-Dêr wearing 'protective pouches' made from a variety of materials: 'cloth', linen, leather, soft skin with hair on it. Even with this direct evidence the details of how these sheaths were worn are not entirely clear but it seems that there may have been at least two sheath types worn by the inhabitants of Naga-ed-Dêr both held up by various cords to a waist belt: a long tube which fitted onto the penis with a pouch to cover the testicles and a penis wrapper of some 13 cm. length (see Ucko 1967: 351–3). Contrary to Baumgartel's statement (1960: 69) several pre-dynastic carved male figurines are shown wearing recognisable sheaths attached to a waist belt, and others are shown with a protrusion

which can be interpreted either as a sheath or as the penis itself considerably enlarged. Now that the evidence from Naga-ed-Dêr is known, there is little reason against accepting these also as representations of sheaths, the absence of belts being either due to artistic convention or reflecting actual technological variety. Sheaths are represented on figurines from both the Amratian and Gerzean period (e.g. Ucko 1968: 75–80, 97 and No. 18), and probably also on several Gerzean vase paintings. An ivory figure from Mahasna (Ucko 1967: 353; 1968: 97) probably shows the existence of long sheaths not unlike gourd types in use in New Guinea today. These excavated male representations are similar, in being sheathed, to several bought figurines the pre-dynastic date of which is questionable (Ucko 1965). These in turn are very different from other bought figurines, the authenticity of which is still to be proved, shown with erect, semi-erect and flaccid uncovered penes (Ucko & Hodges 1963).¹⁵ Bought ivory figurines resemble excavated male figurines from Hierakonpolis and Abydos, some having 'simple' sheaths extending from the navel region to the top of the leg separation and others having 'complex' sheaths, shaped in various ways often including two lateral projections at the level of the testicles, extending from a waist belt quite far down the body (Ucko 1965). The sheaths of these latter figures are closely similar to a bought basalt statue (e.g. Aldred 1949: pl. 1) the date of which is also obscure. The sheath represented upon it has been claimed to have been made from metal or wood (Naville 1900: 68), but is more likely to have been constructed of skin or leather (Luschan 1901: 197; Bates 1914: 123).

Some of the Hierakonpolis and Abydos figures may, or may not date from the Proto-Dynastic period (Ucko 1965; Kemp 1968: 153) as also do several ceremonial palettes which sometimes have sheathed figures represented on them. On the Narmer Palette are shown some figures apparently circumcised, as was also true of some of the Naga-ed-Dêr individuals, and others wearing sheaths. Equally clear are the sheaths shown on the individuals being trampled by a bull on the Louvre Palette, and there are other possible examples on palettes in the Ashmolean and British Museums.

The use of sheaths is also attested in representations of the Old Kingdom (e.g. Fischer 1961: 68; Jequier 1938: 13; Bates 1914: 122; Hölscher 1955: 27; Borchardt 1913: 12). It is in the Vth Dynasty (c. 2565–2420 B.C.) that we find a representation of a woman wearing what on a male would undoubtedly be interpreted as a penis sheath.¹⁶ This representation has received various interpretations, the first based on the supposition that the original meaning of this 'sheath' must have been forgotten since the time when it was used by males (see above) and the second that to wear a 'sheath' was a visible indication of male status (e.g. Bates 1914: 113; Newberry 1915: 102). This is not the only known example of women wearing what morphologically appear to be sheaths, for among

the Sara of Chad, women wear an object shaped like a sheath called a *gol*, which is fitted so that it presses on the vulva and anus either by being attached at the anal end to a waist belt or by being actually forced into the anus. The *gol*, made of vegetable fibres, is normal female wear being washed several times each day and being renewed about every six months (Muraz 1932: 109–10).

There is no doubt that the sheath was also worn in the Middle Kingdom (c. 2134–1786 B.C.) and it is from the Dynasty XII tomb of Senbi at Meir that we have the only representation showing how the sheath was fitted. As far as it is possible to interpret this representation it seems that the vertical penis was inserted into a tubular sheath which was tucked behind and under a belt and which then hung down in a wide flap over the pubic region (see Blackman 1914: 31 and fig. 7). Also from the Middle Kingdom are several other probable representations of sheaths but these are very difficult to distinguish clearly from various types of kilts, many of which are apparently adorned with tassels and hanging appendages (see e.g. Fischer 1961: 73–4; Bates 1914: 122 sq.).

In the New Kingdom (c. 1570–1086 B.C.) there is clear evidence that some of the enemies of Egypt, such as the Tehenu, Meshwesh and possibly Nubians, wore sheaths, sometimes attached to a separate waist belt and sometimes apparently looped and forming part of the belt under which it is tucked (see Bates 1914: 122–4). But the most definite evidence of sheath-wearing in Egypt is the representation of a deity (see below), for most of the other possible Egyptian examples are difficult to distinguish clearly from complex kilt types (see Bates 1914: 122 sqq.; Fischer 1961: 74). Unfortunately, despite numerous attempts, it is not possible to make out accurately the details of the sheathing practices of the Minoans shown in some Egyptian representations (see Evans 1925: 20–1; Evans 1928: 736–9; Pendlebury 1939: 223; Davies 1943: 24–5), nor can much be said from Minoan works themselves (but see Evans 1921: 35 note; Evans 1925: 20–1; Evans 1930: 182; Evans 1935: 22–3, 28; Hutchinson 1962: 110–11; Myres 1902–3: 363–4; Pendlebury 1939: 117, 268). There is, however, textual evidence about the sheaths of other peoples. Normal Egyptian practice was to cut off the hands of enemies slain in war so that accurate counts could be made after a battle, but in a text about the battles of Merneptah against the Libu and Sea Peoples it is said that in some cases they cut off the phalli. These phalli are said to have *kernata*, a foreign word (used only in two Egyptian texts) which is often taken to mean sheath (see e.g. Naville 1900: 68) but which, it has also been argued (partly on linguistic grounds) could equally well mean prepuce (see e.g. Hölscher 1955: 43–5; Bates 1914: 122–4). Accepting the latter argument, Egyptian practice would have been to cut off the hands of those enemies who were circumcised and to cut off the phalli of the uncircumcised. If this is the correct interpretation, it would mean that we

still do not know the Egyptian word for penis sheath, although it has been suggested that there was such a word used in connexion with priests whose duties included the clothing of god and king (Grdseloff 1943: 357–66). Actual depictions of Merneptah's battles, as well as the later ones of Rameses III, show actual heaps of hands and phalli with testicles, and the bodies shown appear to have either hands or un-sheathed penes. By the time of Rameses III the word *kernata* clearly referred to the phallus and not merely the foreskin if the evidence from the representations can be accepted. This is perhaps the major reason against accepting the equation between foreskin and *kernata*, but it should be noted that similar extensions of meaning occur in Hebrew for the Semitic word which *kernata* represents.¹⁷

There is no good evidence for the use of sheaths in Egypt after the New Kingdom and classical authors make no mention of them. The few claims for their existence at this period apparently rest on depictions in Late papyri which are impossible to interpret with any degree of certainty.

Ethology. We have seen several ways in which techniques and methods of attachment influence or determine the angles at which penis sheaths and/or the penis are held. Morris (apparently basing himself on Wickler (1966: 430–3), has recently claimed (1969: 100) that 'status sex' is concerned with dominance display and that one rule about dominance is that it involves the clear display of 'trappings, postures and gestures of dominance'. In Morris's view, phallic symbolism is often cryptic but amongst New Guinea tribesmen it is direct and overt; the greater the erection the greater the degree of threat involved (Morris 1969: 106). In fact, as we have seen, it is clear that different cultures have different penis confinement fashions, which have their own implications regarding sheath angle. There is absolutely no evidence to support a claim that a people who normally wear their sheaths dangling at the end of flaccid penes are therefore less dominant or aggressive than a people who normally have the sheath held more vertically. To consider Morris's thesis seriously, it must be discussed in terms of intra-cultural variations; in a situation such as that which operates among the Bafia of East Cameroon, where the correct angle of the small sheath placed on the end of the penis is said to be of as much concern as are the trouser creases of the modern European (Tessmann 1934: 92–92), it is well worth looking for any evidence to support a correlation between angle chosen and particular personality. In the Bafia case, although the 'most magnificent' sheaths are worn by 'very strong men', this does not seem to be correlated with the sheath angle or length of sheath protrusion but instead with width, weight and a particular decoration incorporating nowadays the top of a smelling-salts bottle. Particular sheath types are always worn in particular ways, aslant and upwards or aslant and to the right. In New Caledonia, penis wrappers are sometimes left to hang down and some-

times, often on feast days, worn tucked up to the belt (Speiser 1933: 189) but there is no evidence to suggest any correlation of the kind suggested by Morris. For the Dani, the New Guinea people to whom Morris refers, who have a wide variety of shaped sheaths from which to choose, it is categorically stated that the gourd sheath 'is not, in any explicit way, a focus of Dani sexuality or eroticism' and that there is no obvious correlation between sheath shape or decoration with status or personality (Heider 1969: 387–8).

In fact, Wickler's (1966) interpretation is partly different from that advanced by Morris; human sheathing of the penis corresponds to territorial 'guard sitting' by baboons and vervet monkeys whereby these animals sit, with their backs to the remainder of their group members, with thighs opened so that the extended or erect penis is clearly visible. To support his interpretation, Wickler stresses the ornamentation and appendages of human sheaths and he maintains that, although penis sheathing varies from village to village, it is always uniform within a village. As has already been seen, such uniformity does not in fact exist and the social contexts of sheathing practices are much more complex than anything suggested by Wickler (see below).

Overt explanation

To date there has been little evidence to explain the morphological variety of sheathing practices reviewed, and it is time to approach this material from a wider functional point of view. An obvious starting point would be the statements and explanations given by the people who practise penis confinement but, in the ethnographic context, such statements are to a large extent absent from the literature. What we find instead are either simple explanatory generalisations on the part of the ethnographer or wide ranging schemes concerned with the evolution of clothing. It is often impossible to distinguish between what is the ethnographer's conclusion and what is direct reporting of a people's explanatory statements. In this situation, it becomes necessary to concentrate on several different levels of analysis: the directly observed practice, the social context of penis confinement and the identity of the sheath wearer. Finally, it will be necessary to consider the evidence from myth, ritual and art to complete this investigation into the significance of sheathing practices.

In view of the paucity of direct ethnographic information, it is essential to search for as wide a range of explanations as possible against which to test observed ethnographic practices (see Ucko & Rosenfeld 1967: 150–8). The clearest statements about the function of the wearing of sheaths come from modern western cultures, an area of information which should not be ignored, for, as already noted, we are dealing with a human activity which is allowed only a limited range of possibilities. In Britain today, as is well known, the male sheath is primarily a contraceptive, devised so as to fit so tightly on to the

penis that it cannot come off during sexual intercourse and which is made so that it is strong enough to contain ejaculated semen. Such contraceptive sheaths were already on sale in different sizes and packed in different coloured wrappers by the eighteenth century (see Finch & Green 1963: 51–2), and in 1970 there are several sheath types available on the market, all with the same primary contraceptive aim. These modern examples vary in colour, shape, lubrication and thickness. The variety of colour and lubrication is aimed at simulating the natural state with a view to attracting buyers; the different shapes aim at increasing the stimulation of either the female or the male by the use of protruding appendages or restricted coverage; different thicknesses aim at deferring or hastening moments of climax. These modern European sheaths focus attention on the multiplicity and variety of functions that a sheath may fulfil at one and the same time. Furthermore they raise the question whether other sheaths are in fact acting as contraceptive devices, not necessarily through being worn during sexual intercourse, but perhaps by preventing erections or at least by delaying orgasms.

Contraception. Ethnographically, the most explicit case of a sheath acting as a contraceptive device is that of the Nioka chief, mentioned previously, who after certain ritual activities is tabooed for the rest of his life from sexual intercourse. To ensure that the taboo is not violated, for this would bring great misfortune to all his people, the chief's sheath is fastened by knots behind his back and these knots are inspected every day (Sousberghe 1954: 214–19). Less explicitly perhaps, virtually all the confinement practices which have been reviewed on previous pages do, as claimed by Gerson (1919: 25), make erection either impossible or painful, for during erection the penis not only changes angle but becomes considerably longer and thicker. There is also evidence that certain ethnographic penis confinement practices may have dire physical consequences; for example, Sorenson and Gadjusek (1966: 159, 161) remark that when the erect penis is artificially held between the thighs 'violent sexual activity is required by men and youths to achieve a response'. There are however virtually no explicit statements by sheath wearers to suggest that contraception or the prevention of erection are primary aims of penis confinement. One exception is the case of the Thonga, for Junod records (1927: 95) that one of their explicit comments on the sheath is that it is an aid to continence, those not wearing sheaths being accused of being immoral adulterers. It is quite possible, although there is nothing in the literature to confirm such a view, that such an attitude also exists among other peoples.¹⁸ Another explicitly sexual aim of penis confinement is that recorded by the ancient Romans. Infibulation, it is clear from Martial (VI, 82) and Juvenal (Satires VI, 73, and VI, 379), was primarily practised to prevent any sexual activity by actors and musicians for, according to Roman and also much later accepted

belief, any form of sexual activity detracts from general physical wellbeing and particularly harms the qualities of the voice. Such infibulation, it is clear, in no way lessened the physical attraction of some of these actors and singers in the view of several Roman ladies. In some small-scale societies the belief exists that sexual activity leads to a diminution of male power, and particular male activities are therefore often surrounded by sexual taboos. The use of penis sheaths might be associated with such a belief although there is no evidence to suggest, except in the Classical and Nioka cases, that sheaths were especially adopted for the performance of particularly male activities.¹⁹ Nevertheless it is worthwhile noting the view that, for several different reasons, genital excretions, and in particular those connected with procreation, are 'pollution-worthy' (Douglas 1966: 125).

Disease. European sheaths were not always simply contraceptives for, already in the sixteenth century, their function was primarily protective against disease (e.g. see Finch & Green 1963: 48). Several claims exist that disease, and particularly bilharzia, was the primary cause for the adoption of sheaths both ethnographically and in antiquity, but there is no good evidence to support this view (see Dingwall 1925 for bibliographical references). Ethnographically, only the Bafia of East Cameroon give an explanation for the use of their present-day palm leaf sheaths which is explicitly medical (Tessmann 1934: 82–5). They maintain that they switched from the use of skin or gourd sheaths to their present small fibre sheaths so that their women could tell whether or not a man had a genital disease. In fact the value of this explicit rationale is highly questionable, for the present Bafia sheaths do, in fact, serve to camouflage any such genital afflictions. Tessmann records that he hoped to add the sheath of a certain prisoner to his collection, but that when the 'prisoner . . . was made to remove his sheath . . . the discharge of gonorrhoea flowed out . . .' and Tessmann decided against including this particular specimen in his collection (1934: 85).

Codpiece. When we proceed even further back into European history we find the use of the codpiece, likened by many authorities to ethnographic penis confinement practices. There is surprisingly little known about the details of the origin of this form of clothing, but there seems little doubt that in the late fourteenth century, when it was invented, the codpiece was considered by the authorities as an essential item to ensure decorum at a time when jerkin and doublet were becoming shorter and hose were tighter (see Rudeck 1897: 45; Binder 1958: 200–1).

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the codpiece became not only an item of obtrusive display and fun, often simulating the sexual organ (see Laver 1951: 8), but also part of recognised armoury and a visible sign of cultural allegiance (see above). That the codpiece was at this time a means of display is shown by the fact that it was often stiffened and padded and frequently decorated with embroidery or with bows

(see Linthicum 1936: 204; Binder 1958: 164), all features which directed the observer's eyes to this area of the body. At this time codpieces were often used as containers for handkerchiefs, purses and napkins, and it is recorded that on some occasions men even secreted spoons or oranges within this item of their clothing (see e.g. Boehn 1923: 107; Cunnington & Cunnington 1954: 118). The excesses of this form of dress are superbly recorded by Rabelais in his *The history of Gargantua and Pantagruel*: 'His codpiece took 24½ yards of the same stuff; and its shape was that of a bowed arch, well and gallantly fastened by two fine old buckles with two enamelled clasps, in each of which was set a huge emerald, the size of an orange. For this fruit has an erective virtue, and is encouraging to the natural member. The vent of the codpiece . . . slashed like his hose, with a blue damask puffing out in the same way. . . . (with) fine wire-thread embroidery and . . . charming platting. . . . For it was always brave, sappy, and moist, always green, always flourishing, always fructifying, full of humours, full of flowers, full of fruit, full of every delight. I swear to God it was a pleasure to look at! . . . Not only was it long and capacious, but well furnished within and well victualled, having no resemblance to the fraudulent codpieces of so many young gentlemen which contain nothing but wind, to the great disappointment of the female sex.' Already in the sixteenth century women had adopted clothing which partially reflected this male item, and any woman who wished to disguise herself as a man was more or less bound to wear the codpiece. In this way Julia in Shakespeare's *Two gentlemen of Verona* (Act II, scene 7, line 53), when discussing with her waiting woman Lucetta how best to disguise herself as a page, is advised by her that to make her disguise effective 'You must needs have them with a cod-piece, Madam', to which she replies . . . 'that will be ill-favoured', but is warned that 'a round hose, Madam, now's not worth a pin, unless you have a cod-piece to stick pins on'. In the seventeenth century the use of the codpiece, except in country areas, became rarer and rarer, for breeches were then separately buttoned or tied (see Cunnington 1954: 122) until, eventually, they became obsolete, and reproductions of the works of Holbein and others had this item of dress removed from them.

This brief review may serve to introduce the question whether the use of sheaths as recorded in ethnography fall within the shame or the display aspect of clothing and it suggests the possibility of the sheath as either a protective device or as a container for miscellanea. It also stresses that one item of dress may come to epitomise the male sex and may therefore, in an ethnographic context, be especially suitable for certain ritual, and especially transvestite, activities.

Shame and display: naked and nude

Much of the secondary literature referring to sheathing practices has been primarily concerned with the history and development of clothing (see Benedict

1951). By far the most common view has been that an instinctive fear, or shame, about the genital area led to the adoption of clothing which therefore consisted, in its earliest form, of a covering of the genitals. The opposite view, that feelings of modesty derive from the use of clothing has been rejected because the feelings exist amongst peoples who wear nothing at all. Other suggestions about the origin of clothing have isolated such factors as the cold or the need for protection against either natural dangers or spiritual powers.

It is the distinction between shame and display which has greatly concerned many of the authorities writing on primitive sheathing practices for, to many of them, there seems an inherent contradiction between the idea of shameful concealment of the genitals and the form and dimensions of some of the sheaths. It is necessary here to widen our investigation to consider exactly what is meant by the use of the terms 'naked', 'nude' and 'shame'. Beidelman (1968: 115) has recently accepted and made use of the distinction originally proposed by Sir Kenneth Clark (1956) whereby nudity is taken to refer to a state of being unclothed without any associated feeling of embarrassment or shame, whereas to be naked signifies a state of embarrassment or even dread (see Rivers 1914: 43). If we accept this distinction for the moment we find, as already noted from the morphology of sheath types, that no feelings of modesty are associated with the unclothed scrotum or testicles amongst the vast majority of penis sheath wearers. There is also considerable evidence that to many peoples who confine the penis it is not the exposure of the penis itself which is a sign of nakedness, but the exposure of the glans (see e.g. Bryant 1949: 125; Speiser 1923: 70). It is this distinction between nudity and the naked glans which formed the basis of several of the theories of cultural relationships, incursions, and invasions reviewed previously (see pp. 32-36 above). For those who tried to trace the influences of different Melanesian immigrant populations it was assumed that feelings of being naked were derived from the practices of circumcision and the consequent exposure of the glans (e.g. Speiser 1934: 136-9). Unfortunately, the literature is in general too poor to be able to talk about the attitudes to various parts of the genitals in any detail (see also Beidelman 1968: 122, note 2), but we do know that the situation is vastly more complex than is suggested in the works of Speiser and others. In New Guinea, for example, the Sohur are exceptional in associating shame with both the penis and the scrotum whereas amongst the Marind-Anim shame is focused on the prepuce (Nevermann 1940: 175). It is also necessary to stress that feelings of shame are not necessarily focused on the genitals at all for, amongst several peoples, they are concentrated instead on the anal region; even when the penis has been incised (e.g. Friederici 1912: 159-60). In several cases it is defecation and not urination which must be undertaken in strict privacy. The extremes of attitudes

to nakedness are well brought out by Sorenson and Gajdusek (1966) for New Guinea where, for example, the Awa wear several thicknesses of skirts to avoid ever having to appear unclothed even in wholly male company. It is clear, however, that most penis sheathing peoples do, in certain circumstances, consider themselves to be naked when deprived of their penis sheaths.

The intellectual distinction between nude and naked has been quite a useful one (see Beidelman's (1966) analysis of the Swazi king as denuded of status and as a solitary figure) but in many ways the point made by St Augustine in *The City of God against the Pagans* (IV, Bk. 14, XVII) is even more important. According to St Augustine's view, the pubic parts only became shameful after man's first sin so that before this time, as stated in *Genesis* (II, 25), 'they were both naked, and were not ashamed'. 'And the reason for this is not that they were unaware of their nakedness, but that this nakedness was not yet base.' When grace was lost 'there came to be in the action of the body a certain shameless novelty, and thereafter nudity was indecent. It drew their attention and made them embarrassed.' The importance of this statement is that it focuses attention on the fact that shame regarding undress is dependent not merely on what happens to be worn in a particular society but on the particular social contexts under consideration. In other words, it may not be embarrassing to be seen without a sheath in certain situations but in other social contexts to be without a sheath may be acutely distasteful.

When we turn to sheathing practices recorded in ethnography we see the immediate utility of this approach. Firstly, on the cross-cultural level we find that what is considered appropriate dress for a certain situation is inappropriate in another culture. Thus, amongst the Namchi of the Cameroons and several northern Nigerian tribes, the penis sheath is removed before burial (Leiris 1934: 66, note 3; Meek 1925: 116), whilst among other sheath wearers, such as the Gurma of the Upper Volta, correct burial rites demand the wearing of a penis sheath (Froelich 1949: 110, 178). Amongst the LoDagaa of Ghana, the corpse of an unmarried man is buried with the penis tied under the waist belt, the practice of young boys, thus symbolising the shame of never having become a husband (Goody 1962: 84). Secondly within a particular culture the uncovered penis or glans only causes shame in certain situations; amongst the Seka and Bangu-Anim of New Guinea (e.g. Wirz 1928: 145) only when women are around, amongst the Remo of Peru only when in public (Zerries 1964: 119), and amongst several South African tribes only when an unexpected visitor calls at the house or when crossing water (e.g. Vaillant 1796: 362). Similarly we also find, for example in the New Hebrides (Speiser 1923: 70) that to be unsheathed, and thus to expose the glans, is not shameful when performing certain activities such as planting or, amongst the Dani of New Guinea (Heider 1969: 383)

when doing particularly muddy work. In other social situations all these people would consider it shameful to be without one's sheath.

Where there is shame associated with being naked this takes different forms in different societies. Amongst the Urubu of Brazil, for example, the tying of the prepuce seems to be a straightforward matter of embarrassment, for those who are not yet old enough to tie up the prepuce but who are, nevertheless, conscious of the size of their organs, cover the penis with their hands, and, in general, any adult who was seen without his sheath would die of shame (Huxley 1957: 142–3). This same theme of shame finds expression in Urubu myth together with an implication of strength associated with the glans (Huxley 1957: 241, 249, 261).

To be ashamed of being seen without one's sheath is true of many sheath wearers in all parts of the world. As Huxley and Cope (1965: 20) have put it with specific reference to the Amahuaca of Peru, to appear without one's sheath 'is as embarrassing as for a New Yorker to discover himself bare-bottomed in Times Square'. In extreme cases such modesty extends even to situations where a group of people are bathing together (see e.g. the Parintintin (Nimuendaju 1948: 290)) and may even result in the sheath being removed only when under water (e.g. Von Koenigswald 1908: 223). The Brazilian Tupari, who do not remove their sheaths even for bathing, consider Europeans who bathe in the nude and neighbouring tribes who are reputedly nude all the time, as similar to tapirs and monkeys (Casper 1952: 156; 1953: 209; Lévi-Strauss 1969: 266). Amongst the Gaika of South Africa an individual who exposes himself without his sheath is subject to a specific fine (Maclean 1858: 126) whilst amongst the Dani of New Guinea sexual modesty is the only explicit reason given by the people themselves for the use of their gourd sheaths which are put on while carefully turning their backs on any other people present (Heider 1969: 387). It is interesting to note in this connexion that many sheath wearers when forced to remove their sheaths for urination adopt a squatting posture.

The correlation between being naked and feeling shame is, however, not as straightforward as it may so far appear to be. For example (Frobenius 1913: 323) points out that among the Tamberama of the Upper Volta only some men actually wear a sheath and no shame is shown by the non-sheath wearers. Furthermore little fuss is made when a sheath needs readjustment, a not infrequent occurrence, and for dancing the sheaths are often removed without embarrassment, either by the man himself or by his female partner. Similarly in parts of New Guinea it is not exceptional for the sheath to become detached while walking (see above), in which case the person concerned simply walks away and adjusts his covering (Neuhauss 1911: 196). In other New Guinea cases, as for example amongst the Pesegem, when the sheath comes off, a temporary covering of leaves is applied

(Nouhuys 1913: 14). It is also important to note that to feel shame is not always simply a matter of being totally unclothed, for penis sheaths are sometimes worn, as was the case with codpieces, with the Classical Maori and in the Himalayas still today, with many other items of body covering. Furthermore, embarrassment may be caused just as much by the wearing of the 'incorrect' form of dress as by the uncovering of a particular part of the body. Thus, we have already noted the case of the Bafia where the correct positioning and angle of the sheath worn is a matter of great concern, and we must also remember the great number of cases recorded where the European custom of wearing trousers, although covering both penis and anus, is considered highly indecent. As Beidelman remarks (1968: 123) for the Nuer 'it is not the sight of the genitalia in itself which is thought to cause injury so much as the disrespect in not observing the convention'—although the Nuer now wear shorts 'they continue to wear as well over them . . . the wild cat's fur traditionally worn'.

Almost all that has been said with regard to feelings of shame and the wearing of penis sheaths applies equally well to people who do not wear sheaths. As Malinowski wrote for the Trobriand Islanders, who wear a pubic leaf: 'It is bad, shameful and ludicrous in a degrading sense not to conceal, carefully and properly, those parts of the human body which should be covered by dress. . . . However when it is necessary for practical reasons for males to take off the pubic leaf, as during the fishing or diving activities, this is done without either false shame or the slightest symptom of improper interest. The natives convey clearly by behaviour and comment that nakedness is not shameful when it is necessary, but becomes so when due to carelessness or lewdness' (Malinowski 1929: 53, 255, 379, 380).

We must return here to the starting point of this particular discussion, for there can be no doubt that many of the sheathing practices, with their associated beliefs of impropriety and shame, are nevertheless striking and noticeable. As Koch-Gruneberg (1910: 89) and many others have said, penis sheaths can hardly be adopted because of shame about the genitals if they are painted and adorned with tassels. Similarly, Sande has argued (1970: 39) that New Guinea gourd sheaths, however much they in fact hide, must be instrumental in focusing attention on the sexual area and possibly in accentuating virility. Support for the view that sheathing practices are part of display activity comes not only from the ethologists (see above) and from the elaboration of some of the practices themselves but also from some hints, as for example those by Frobenius (1913: 324), that it is predominantly the young boys rather than the old men who wear sheaths. In the context of display the parallel has often been drawn between ethnographic sheathing practices and the historic European codpieces whose history, development and blatantly exaggerated nature, have been shortly reviewed above.

This display factor becomes explicit in the dances of, for example, the Tamberama of the Upper Volta, for their dancing sheaths are larger and more noticeable than are those worn for everyday activities (Frobenius 1913: 324). The same interpretation can be offered for many of the decorations on, and carved shapes of, several South African sheaths. We have already noted several seemingly flamboyant examples of New Guinea gourd sheaths as well as the use of appendages and fur, all of which could be associated with display. In New Caledonia the norm is a simple penis wrapper but on feast days specially painted examples are worn which have wider bases and are curved round to the top (e.g. Speiser 1919: 166; Sarasin 1929: 156); here again, we must accept a display element. In the case of the Admiralty Islands, as we have already seen, penis shells are carried about all the time but are only worn for war or dancing; the islanders are otherwise nude. It is impossible to reject the suggestion that we are dealing with phallic display and decoration (see e.g. Thilenius 1903: 129–30; Mead 1942: 38, 132). At this stage it is important to note that all these aspects of display have obvious morphological features but with South American practices of tying up the penis any display is limited, by definition, to the colouring matter of the thread used. The literature on these South American practices is very poor, but even when the threads are coloured red it has been claimed that the intention is not decorative but to protect against evil magic (e.g. Karsten 1962a: 152). This is not to say that display is not the aim of other South American practices; for example, among the Bororo of Brazil the use of decorated penis sheaths as social signals is obvious (see below).

It is now clear that a simple distinction between nude and naked is less useful than it at first sight appeared to be, and furthermore that its use has served to camouflage the interesting fact, already suggested by the example of modern contraceptive sheaths, that sheaths may have a multiplicity of functions. There can be no doubt that many of the sheaths of primitive peoples are at one and the same time performing the functions of shame coverings and display signs. It has perhaps become a truism in modern Europe to say that one conceals what one wishes to display but this is nevertheless an appropriate statement about many of the sheathing practices recorded by ethnographers. As Birket-Smith has said (1965: 182) sheaths may be designed to protect the genitalia from view but this by no means implies that they are designed to conceal the existence of the sheathed items. From this point we may go back to Westermarck's (1921: 553) argument that most clothing is designed to allure, and add that it is perhaps true to say that the less one actually sees the more one can imagine. There is in this context perhaps a valid parallel between the use of sheaths in the ethnographic context and the use of lipstick or the brassiere (with or without its small decoration or bow on the front) in the modern western world.

Receptacle. As we have already seen, the codpiece during its heyday acted as a receptacle as well as a covering of the penis. This function is found also for some sheathing practices among primitive peoples. In some areas of New Guinea the sheath is evidently considered a place for keeping things not only accessible but also dry, for the Kaya Kaya keep tinder in their sheaths (Bruijn 1915: 85) and the Wiram of Trans Fly use them 'as a repository for tobacco and other odds and ends' (Williams 1936: 397). Williams also recounts the meeting of an expedition with peoples around Everill Junction who were munching shrimps 'and continually helping themselves to further supplies secreted in the covers of their pubic shells'. In other areas the transportation aspect of the sheath is restricted to the occasional needle stuck in the wad of fur or fibre at the end of the sheath (Heider 1969: 388).

Protection. Codpieces, as we have seen, also became integral parts of protective armour, as have also various types of more recent sheaths used in sports, and this is an explanation sometimes offered for sheathing among non-literate peoples, not usually for defence against human attack but as protection against natural dangers and irritants, insect, animal and vegetable. In several cases, especially in South America, this is the only explicit explanation offered by the sheath wearers themselves and it is by far the most common interpretation offered by the ethnographers (e.g. Nordenskiöld 1922: 94; Koch-Gruneberg 1910: 89; Karsten 1926b: 172; Becher 1955: 145; Junger 1926: 107; etc.). There is little doubt that in several parts of South America where sheaths are worn the dangers and inconveniences from insects and fish at least are considerable. Thus Friederici (1912: 156) records the unmaning from fish bites of several people who bathed without wearing a penis cover. Furthermore in Guiana and the mouth of the Orinoco the humidity may be as much as 100 per cent., a situation which must favour the minimum of non-functional clothing. The same explanation has also been offered by many of the ethnographers working in New Guinea and Africa. The Omand of the Cameroons themselves say that they wear sheaths as protection against small creatures that creep up their legs while they are seated (Tessmann 1934: 83), and the Thonga of South Africa are similarly explicit in stating that their sheaths are protection against ants (Junod 1927: 40). But one fact which argues against the protection against natural hazards being the sole or even major reason for the wearing of sheaths is the patchy nature of their distribution (see figs. 1–4), for the same natural hazards exist in many different areas, some where sheaths are worn and some where they are not. If such sheathing practices were really effective against major natural irritants one would expect to find them in use by tribes who were in contact with each other and were subject to the same natural hazards, but this is often not the case (see above).

For New Guinea it has sometimes been claimed that the sheaths are protective against human attack in the same way as cuirasses (Reisenfeld 1946: 34), but this is not a convincing interpretation as the amount of protection afforded even by the cuirass is very questionable (see Austen 1947: 97), and in any case the sheaths are too brittle to be good defence against arrows (Heider 1969: 387).

Several morphological features argue against the protective function of many sheaths. First, that many of the ends of sheaths are left open thus affording little protection against insects or fish. Second, that most sheathing practices, not only in America but also in Africa, New Guinea and the Pacific Islands, leave the testicles totally uncovered. Third, that many sheath types are very small indeed as well as being relatively unstable. But perhaps the most striking point against accepting any simple single explanation either in terms of display, shame or protection for the use of sheaths is the very widespread custom of continuing to wear sheaths under other adopted forms of clothing such as shirts, kilts or trousers. All the forms of sheathing reviewed above—the prepuce tied at the end of the glans, the penis wrapper, the manufactured penis sheath—are found still in use under adopted European clothing in all parts of the world (e.g. Tessmann 1934: pl. II; Lebuf 1936: 16; Tooke 1962: 81; Lembezat 1961: 123; Meek 1925: 39; Speiser 1923: 72; Sarasin 1929: 156; Zerries 1964: 118; Nordenskiöld 1924: 148; etc.). In regions of New Guinea where the sheaths are made of long gourds this is often no easy feat, but cases are known where a special hole is cut in the front of a pair of trousers (Nouhuys 1913: 14) or where the sheath protrudes through the left leg of the trousers (personal communication, B. A. L. Cranstone). There is even one case recorded for the Admiralty Islands of a shell being worn under a loin cloth (Nevermann 1934: 111).

Nevertheless, in view of the remarks made above about the importance which is often attached to adhering to accepted clothing custom, it would be dangerous to exclude an originally protective function of some sheaths as an important reason for their being worn. Furthermore, in the context of human warfare, their psychological effects may have been considerable. As we have seen, many of the sheaths, especially in New Guinea, may be very flamboyant and they may easily be associated with an aggressive swagger or, as has been seen for the Admiralty Islands, an explicit phallic display. Furthermore, with the possible exception of some ancient Egyptian, recent European and modern Sara practice, they are an exclusively masculine symbol and could easily have been associated with ferocity and virility within the context of warfare. There is rather contradictory evidence regarding the sheath types worn in warfare from different parts of the world. For the Dani of New Guinea (Heider 1969: 386) it is stated that these sheaths are normally of the short and straight variety,

features which are correlated with the ease of keeping the sheaths anchored in place. For the Xhosa of South Africa, however, we have unique evidence to show that the sheaths worn for fighting were of the normal gourd type but were somewhat longer and were adorned with chains which sometimes had small bells attached to them (Louw 1938: 63–4). For some other South African tribes also it is recorded that sheaths worn in warfare are larger than those worn for everyday activities.

There are some few remaining explanations of sheath wearing which are based either on explicit statements by the sheath wearers themselves or on practices observed by the ethnographers in the field. Thus, in several parts of New Guinea, excitement, wonder or fear leads to the drumming of the finger nails on the gourd sheaths which, amongst the Dani at least, is also a means of expressing agnatic relationship (Nouhuys 1912: 14; Heider 1969: 388).

Orifices. With perhaps more general application is the wearing of the *gol* by Sara women; we have already seen that the wife of a Libyan chief is shown in an ancient Egyptian representation to be wearing what looks like a male sheath and we have also noted that in Europe women sometimes opted to wear dress simulating the male codpiece. Sara women, however, wear the *gol* with no explicit wish to appear masculine but because they aim to exclude those evil spirits which wander freely around and who seek to gain entrance to the human body through its orifices. Whereas Sara men are initiated into special societies whose rites include flagellation to separate the good spirits from the bad, the woman block both vagina and anus by the use of the *gol* (Muraz 1928: 4–7; Baumann & Westermann 1948: 298). There is, in the literature, a small body of evidence which suggests that sheathing acts as protection not so much against natural dangers as against such things as evil spirits, the evil eye and especially the harmful spirits of dead animals (e.g. Karsten 1962a: 150; Polykrates 1969: 161; Palmer 1922–3: 123; Baumann 1938: 235; Speiser 1923: 70–4; Graebner 1924: 49). In general, as for the Sara, the assumption is made that such evil influences can gain entrance to the human body through its natural orifices, especially the genitalia, which are therefore blocked by various different methods. There is some evidence to suggest that this belief lies behind several of the practices from different parts of the world designed to prevent contact between water and the human body (e.g. Vaillant 1796: 362; Karsten 1935: 453). Amongst the Jibaro of Peru the normal clothing is the loin cloth but when crossing water the penis is tied up, in this case apparently because the the Jibaro believe that contact between the glans and water will impede erection. It is in this context that several of the claims for the Pacific Islands that the penis wrapper acts as a blockage against a particular evil spirit fit into some explanatory context (e.g. Somerville 1894: 368). A rather similar argument is advanced by some authorities for Melanesia in

general in terms of a special spiritual presence which is situated in the glans following incision or circumcision and whose exit from the human body is blocked by the use of a penis sheath (e.g. Rivers 1914: 432, 434–6). Here again it becomes important to remember the argument that body symbolism is part of the common stock of symbols and that orifices of the body therefore symbolise especially vulnerable parts. The ritual protection of bodily orifices can be treated as a symbol of social preoccupations about exits and entrances (Douglas 1966: 121, 126). It must, however, be noted that many peoples who practice some form of penis confinement do not block other orifices and that, in general, the penis when it is sheathed, can be thought to be a socially controlled instrument of relationship and to have little connexion with other body orifices (see below).

Some other explanations are specific to the tribes concerned. Thus amongst some South American tribes the wish apparently exists to have elongated prepuces, a condition which may possibly result from tying the prepuce beyond the glans and up to the belt (Zerries 1964: 119). Amongst the Thonga of South Africa sheaths are considered valuable not only because of the protection that they afford against natural hazards but because they protect the wearers from contact with the earth (Junod 1927: 95).

The Namchi of the Cameroons apparently believe that the confinement of the penis will result in a strong organ and therefore in the birth of many children (Leiris 1934: 66, note 3), and this same theme of sexual prowess resulting from sheathing the penis finds occasional echo in other ethnographic reports. Thus, for the Waika of Venezuela, Zerries (1964: 122) reports that beyond the practical protection afforded by this custom the Waika expect to gain additional virility, and a similar belief involving the health of the penis and success with women exists amongst the Ghanaian LoDagaa (Labouret 1931: 392). Amongst the Thonga of South Africa the same theme also recurs; at the time of a boy's first emission a rite is performed to ensure strength and virility and it is at this time that the sheath is first worn (Junod 1927: 95).

Social contexts

I have reviewed the explicit statements of the people concerned and the direct observations by the ethnographers and I now move to a consideration of the social context in which sheaths are worn and the identity of the sheath wearers. For all the societies for which we have sufficient data the wearing of a sheath, at least for its first putting on, is closely correlated with age or social status. In other words sheaths are not worn by children below a certain age, another factor arguing against an unitary explanation of sheath wearing in terms of protection against natural hazards. The exact age at which a sheath is first worn differs widely from society to society, from three to fifteen years old, as does also the formality of

the occasion when the sheath is first presented or put on or the prepuce first tied beyond the glans. However, in the vast majority of societies this event is correlated with either sexual (pubertal) or social maturity, an event which is often defined by initiation rites which may or may not include circumcision/incision rites as well. In some societies this is the occasion for the first opportunity for a boy to adopt a sheath, whereas in other societies this is the time for a change in genital clothing; in the case of the Tenda of Guinea for a change from the boy's string corset to the adult reed sheath (Techer 1933: 660). We may deduce for ancient Egypt that the same differentiation between youth and adult was in operation, for the young children on the Sahure relief are shown without sheaths (see Bates 1914: 123). Similarly Zulu youths are distinct from adults in that they wear no sheath at all or an imitation sheath made from a cocoon (Bryant 1949: 168). In Ghana, the LoDagaa young men have the penis placed under a waist band whereas married men have the penis placed into a cloth bag (Rattray 1932: 450). As the LoDagaa example shows, sheaths may not always be indicators of pre- and post-pubertal status but may be markers for any recognised social status. In New Guinea in the Digoel and Star regions the gourd is the normal type of sheath but both boys and old men wear black nut sheaths (Le Roux 1948: 114). Amongst the Marind-Anim to the south different sheath types serve to distinguish and exemplify different stages in social development for this is a society with patrilineal descent where age groups exist from infancy onwards. Children go nude from infancy onwards until the change of status to adolescence when they wear a pubic shell given to them by their maternal uncle. When they reach the grade of those-about-to-be-married the penis is placed under a tight hip belt and covered with a shell phallocrypt. At a later age the Marind-Anim continue to wear the penis under the belt or they adopt the penis shell or half coconut sheath (see Nevermann 1940: 175; Wirz 1922: 55; 1928: 14–17; Baal 1966: 140, 157; for rather conflicting details).

As already noted, the sheaths are first adopted in an informal or formal situation, depending on the society concerned. The Bafia of East Cameroon are a case where the adoption is informal, and boys of between five and seven wear small maize leaf or plaited net-like sheaths which they have made for themselves unless they are lucky enough to have been given better specimens by their fathers (Tessmann 1934: 91). Amongst the Kayapo of Brazil there is a special sheath-giving ceremony which takes place at puberty and which is a necessary prerequisite for allowing long hair which itself is a stage in the progression towards ritual betrothal, from which time onwards they are allowed to become sexually active (Turner 1969: 57). There are numerous accounts of the initiation rites which surround the adoption of the penis sheath, which often involve a considerable

period of seclusion of the boys before they enter the adult world. Amongst the Tupari of western Brazil, boys are first given their sheaths at about twelve years of age in a ceremony which precedes initiation rites by several years. The chief fastens the sheath onto the boy's penis only after considerable feasting and the flogging of the boy (Casper 1953: 208; 1956-8; 154). It is for the Bororo of Brazil that we have perhaps the best account of sheathing practices and their subsequent role as display pieces (see Crocker 1969; Lévi-Strauss 1936; Fric & Radin 1906; Karsten 1926*a*). Normal everyday sheaths are put on during initiation rites which take place after a youth's first adult erection. Only after the sheath has been adopted can someone marry and these sheaths are worn all the time, at least until old age. On certain feast days, however, the normal sheaths are changed for ornate ones with pendants made from stiff straw which are decorated with down and feathers and painted. Each decoration is the property of a particular ranked clan or subclan. In some societies, as we have seen, these puberty rites and the adoption of penis sheaths are associated with circumcision or incision rites, and these occasions are in general marked by greater formality than are the occasions so far reviewed above. Amongst the Namchi of the Cameroons two days of special ritual culminate with the blacksmith removing the normal penis sheath and circumcising the penis (Leiris 1934: 67, 69). Similarly amongst the Bhaca of South Africa a lightly constructed penis box is worn to cover the glans after the prepuce has been removed during initiation rites (Kohler 1933: 10). This association between the assumption of sheaths and circumcision rites has led some people to postulate a further protective function for the ethnographic sheath; namely that of protecting the newly circumcised penis (e.g. Sarasin 1929: 156). This is an explanation which seems without doubt to be valid for certain cases where a soft fibre sheath, green leaves or soft skin sheath is applied immediately after the circumcision operation for a limited time before the adoption of the normal sheath made of other materials (e.g. Leiris 1934: 70). However Layard, while accepting this explanation for Vao, reports for the Small Islands of the New Hebrides that the newly incised novices are without penis wrappers during their seclusion but must wear protective wrappers once they leave their seclusion, and this despite the fact that their wounds heal after some ten days. Here, Layard suggests, the protection is not aimed at the newly circumcised penis but at the newly acquired spirit located in the glans. But even in Vao, novices on the fifth day of their seclusion remove their wrappers and run the gauntlet of rows of initiates who throw ash onto their unhealed wounds (Layard 1942: 515). This post-operative protective function is clearly not the primary aim of most sheathing practices for, apart from anything else as we have seen, the wearing of penis sheaths is as much associated with those who do not practice circumcision as with those who do.

From this review it seems inevitable that we accept yet another function of the penis sheath; to define status and to act as a visible sign of newly acquired social status or as a restatement of existing social hierarchy. In the Kayapo case, Turner (1969: 57) argues that the adoption for the first time of a sheath is one form of public recognition of a person's growing sexuality and that Kayapo sheaths are in general the expression of the social control and regulation of a mature male's sexual powers. Much the same points are made by Maybury-Lewis (1967: 106) for the Akwe-Shavante of Brazil, amongst whom the first sheaths are given by mature males to boys of between seven and twelve years of age while they are secluded in a bachelor's hut. Here the sheath symbolises physical maturity and is at the same time an expression of social control over sexual potential. Amongst the Urubu of Brazil a boy nowadays ties his own prepuce at about the time of puberty when he becomes embarrassed by the size of his own organ, or he gets his mother to do it for him. In the past, however, it was the village war chief who tied a man's prepuce, thus transforming him into one of his warriors and thereby making visible the person's new status as an adult man (Huxley 1957: 153). In many of these cases we can say that the wearing of sheaths is a symbol of political status. One of the most explicit examples of this state of affairs is that found in Malekula. According to Deacon (1934) penis wrappers in Malekula have to be bought at each rise in rank, so that wrappers can be arranged in a series of more or less prestige. Entry to the first grade is obtained by simple payment by the novice's father and only after an operation on the novice's prepuce, in or after the third grade, does he acquire his first penis wrapper. In Layard's account (1942: 42) boys adopt a banana leaf wrapper at puberty; at initiation a ceremonial plaited pandanus leaf wrapper, painted with red or yellow dye and adorned with tassels, is placed over the original one. These decorated wrappers vary according to the status of the wearer, and this in turn depends to some extent on the person's economic situation. Fair payments are regulated by spirits who send illness or death whenever 'sacred objects' are sold too cheaply (Deacon 1934: 578; pl. 21). Youths who are initiated rather later than is the norm wear half-wrappers (plate 21). In Southern Malekula even the dead are provided with appropriately ranked penis wrappers (plate 22).

As we have just seen, the identity of the sheath wearers depends to a great extent in many societies on the age and therefore on the social status of the person concerned. In several, but not all, societies to be sober but not to wear a sheath is also to signal a socially recognised role to the community at large. Amongst the Thonga, as we have seen, the absence of a sheath is normally enough to label one as a potential adulterer. Amongst some groups of Dani of New Guinea, to be unsheathed is to be undergoing a particular seizure, amongst other groups to be feeble

minded (see Heider 1969: 383–4). The absence of a sheath is quite commonly a sign of mourning amongst several peoples in different parts of the world, a sign of temporary withdrawal from social participation, but it is only amongst the Thonga of South Africa that there is a special mourner's rite which involves the sheath. A Thonga male at the death of his first wife joins the Widower's Society; the rite starts with the burial of his wife and continues with ritual bathing in a pool and the incision of the widower in the inguinal region. The widower then throws away his penis sheath and walks across his hut in tears (Junod 1927: 202).

In other societies, as we have seen also, the wearing of a sheath is defined by the particular social context. In some cases the reason for the adoption of a sheathing practice appears to be purely functional; thus in some parts of Peru the penis is sometimes anchored out of the way to ease movement during the climbing of trees. In other societies the sheathing practice appears to be restricted to certain professions only. The evidence of Greek representation shows that this was the case with wrestlers, athletes (see plate 14) and boxers, whilst the Roman representations of males wearing a fibula are all musicians to whom can be added youthful trainee performers, slaves and actors mentioned in the literature. For the ancient world this practice is taken to have been purely protective but in Japan it is said to prevent the evaporation of strength through the penis (see Dingwall 1925; and above). The case of ancient Egypt is very curious in its own right. As we have seen we can no longer accept that all those people represented with sheaths were in every case Libyans although in some cases, such as Senbi and possibly the wife of a chief, this may well have been so (see Borchardt 1913: 11; Hölscher 1955). Those who have favoured the Libyan origin of sheathing customs have assumed that within ancient Egypt itself the custom of sheathing became restricted to hunting activities (e.g. Fischer 1961: 68). However, whether or not we accept that an Old Kingdom priestly title derived from the word for phallus sheath, the actual Egyptian evidence is much more complex. In one case we find a Libyan and his attendant both wearing sheaths but in the tomb of this same man's son, only the attendant is sheathed. If we accept all the possible examples of sheathing represented in ancient Egyptian representations (see above) it becomes clear that this form of dress was widespread and not simply a hunting costume. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that we find some Nile Gods shown with sheaths (see Borchardt 1913: 29). On present evidence there is no justification for assuming that there were Libyan originals for these deities just because they are sheathed. We must conclude, rather, that the sheath was an acknowledged form of 'clothing' fit for the gods. Furthermore, in the Egyptian context, we must note one more sheathed representation of a deity (see Daressy 1906: 25, no. 38068). A limestone statue

from Karnak, dating from the XVIIIth Dynasty, is shown with a penis sheath. Unfortunately the identification of the deity represented is uncertain; one likelihood is that it represents the god Ptah-Tanen, another that it represents a form of the god Ra. The tempting view that the figure could represent the king himself, in this case Amenophis II, wearing the costume of his Libyan subjects must be ruled out, for the statue is clearly shown with the long beard of divinity (personal communications, H. S. Smith and C. Aldred). Whatever is the correct identification of this deity there is no possible suggestion of any Libyan association. Why only this one representation of Ra or Ptah-Tanen should be shown wearing a penis sheath, and what this reflects about the ancient Egyptians' view of sheaths, is for the present totally obscure.²⁹

In ethnography, it is reported for several societies that there is a difference in incidence of sheath wearing between the young and the old. We have already seen one kind of interpretation of such evidence which would seek to argue that where old men are predominantly the ones to wear penis sheaths this is an indication that the practice is in the process of dying out. Another interpretation mentioned by Friederici for the Tupinamba of Brazil (1912: 156) is that the sheath might have acted as a protection against the shame of old age. It is far more likely, however, if we follow Métraux (1948b: 105) that Tupinamba youths were characterised by their tying of the prepuce beyond the glans and that they were thus distinct from their elders who wore manufactured penis sheaths. The remainder of the literature is contradictory and unsatisfactory regarding the differential use of sheaths, and particular sheath types, by the old as opposed to the young. In each case the argument can be made that the old men no longer had a natural interest in appearing virile and flamboyant, or that the custom of sheath wearing was simply dying out. Although Heider (1969) has made it clear that for the Dani there is no regular association between any particular sheath type and the age, personality or status of the wearer, there are reports from other parts of the world that social importance is associated with distinctive sheath types, woven instead of plaited wrappers, horns instead of nut sheaths, elaborate instead of simple covers, and so on (e.g. Speiser 1934: 139; Meek 1925: 41; Marwick 1940: 85).

Levels of analysis

At the beginning of this paper it was said that one of the virtues of studies of material culture was that they are based on tangible reality. It can be argued that this is in itself no reason for staying at the explicit and observable level of interpretation of data, as has been done so far in this paper. We have already considered the views of Wickler (1966) and Morris (1969) and have seen how difficult it is to accept their interpretation of penis sheathing. We have found a

variety of detail and possible significance for confining the penis whereas both these authorities assume a universal significance to the sheathing practice. One result of the cross-cultural approach attempted here must be to reject Wickler's assumption that the sheathing practices of New Guinea, South America, Melanesia, the Etruscans and the fifteenth and sixteenth century Europeans were all simply a matter of aggressive display. This is not to deny the value of an ethological approach to such data for it is clear that in the case of the Sara at least an approach in Morris's terms of the 'unconscious mimicry' of the male organ, which may sometimes extend to the adoption of a pseudo rump or scrotum, can provide an added insight to a particular form of material culture. In the case of the Sara, despite the absence of explicit male identification when the *gol* is worn, the shape of this artefact is clearly phallic in its upward curve and its hanging 'testicles'. We may also suspect a similar subconscious symbolism and identification for ancient Egyptian and sixteenth and seventeenth century European attire but this is bound to remain no more than a suspicion. Forge has argued in the 1965 Curl Lecture (1965: 25), that the overt meaning of any symbol has little or no importance. It is at the deeper level of analysis of what is admitted by Forge (1965: 25) to be possibly the level of the subconscious that discussions of penis sheathing, at least, get into trouble. We may surmise a loaded symbolism connected with the placing of the penis in an erect position under a waist belt but, despite the claims of such authorities as Le Roux (1948) and Baal (1966), there is virtually nothing in the recorded literature to support such an interpretation. Again, this is not to decry such an approach to the data but simply to insist on the differences which exist between studies which start from observable reality and which demand that each switch to theoretical abstraction be visibly related to the observable data, and those studies which approach material on the basis of any assumed universal principles of structure or symbolism. The differences in levels of analysis are very evident when we look at Layard's (1942: 477; 1961: 254-5) interpretations of the New Hebrides wrapper. Layard claims that the wrapper is a sign of bodily sacrifice and is protective in the sense of preventing any loss of the power situated in the glans. He then proceeds to interpret the penis wrapper in general as a symbol of manhood and man's ability to conquer the forces of nature and in the particular context of initiation as the symbolic means for female power to be conveyed to male novices. Similarly Lévi-Strauss, after a complex discussion of the relative merits of various existing forms of Bororo myth concludes (1966: 46) that these Brazilian sheaths are identified 'not with the female sex in general, but with the women of the moiety and even of the clan, and subclan, to which the novice belongs and with which the sponsor's subclan prefers to inter-marry—in other words, with those women who might be the sponsors in "brides"' (and see Yalman

1967: 74-5). These various possible levels of analysis become clear when we consider penis sheaths within the context of primitive art.

Art. At the most obvious level we must note the rarity in all parts of the world of representations of the human figure shown wearing sheaths. There are two possible explanations; the first, that figures are supposed to be represented naked/nude and that the sheaths are considered to be clothing and the second, that it is technically difficult to represent the male penis, let alone penis sheath, especially on representations carved in the round (see Forge 1965: note 9; Ucko 1968: 337). In addition we must note the common practice of adding external articles to the basic carved or modelled figure as for example, is found in the New Hebrides. Here the basic clay-modelled form of the dead person is given a 'real' penis wrapper made of the correct fibres and indicating appropriate status (see plate 22). Nevertheless it is striking that virtually no representations with a penis sheath are known from New Guinea. The one exception being a figure with penis held up by the belt (see p. 33). In South America, however, figures shown with the penis bound up to the belt are known from both ancient and modern contexts (see Barrades 1954; Ruel 1967). The numerous sheathed representations which we have seen from ancient Egypt and Classical Greece and Rome are in marked contrast to the ethnographic situation. There is, however, one exceptional wooden carving, said to have been obtained from the Zulu before 1919, which is shown with flaccid penis, provided with a detachable glans cover, which is partially hidden by a skirt (plate 24).

Some of the sheaths used in non-literate societies are themselves art objects and might perhaps be thought suitable material for providing insight into the subconscious values and activities of their carvers. Unfortunately many of the representations on New Guinea gourd sheaths are extremely difficult to interpret. Even when the content of the art can be made out, the problem is to assess the significance of the association between specific content and the fact that it is shown on a penis sheath. The problem is again one of method and levels of analysis. A symbolic identification can be simply assumed or, and this is much more the method of established studies of material culture, a consistency between content and the penis or its sheath must be demonstrated. Unfortunately the data are simply not available at the present time to demonstrate or deny any such a consistent association. It is possibly correct, as claimed by Preuss (1899: 172-6) and Sande (1907: pls. 15-16) that certain New Guinea gourd sheaths are decorated with birds, flying foxes, snakes, lizards and possibly crabs but their identification with the penis in the imagery of their carvers is still to be demonstrated. What is at least certain is that this decoration is predominantly situated on the side of the sheath opposite the aperture intended to receive the penis, and that this decoration is therefore visible

to the observer. The bamboo sheaths of the Mimika of New Guinea are themselves also art objects (see plates 8a, 8b, 9). They are again decorated on the surfaces visible to the observer but their decorations are almost entirely geometric, made up of lozenges, chevrons, semicircles, dots, zigzags, and triangles (see Fischer 1913: 48–50; Haddon & Layard 1916; Zuid-West Nieuw-Guinea Expeditie 1908). As already noted some Mimika sheaths are themselves shaped as the legs and lower part of the human body. The observer sees the legs, which are shaped exactly as are some ceremonial house posts (Landtmann 1933) as if they were upside down. It has been claimed (Haddon & Layard 1916: 35) that at the lower ends of most Mimika sheaths an isolated lozenge has been cut out representing the vulva which is outlined by an engraved line which runs from the manufactured peak of the lower end of the sheath. This same lozenge has also been claimed to represent the human eye (Rawling 1913: 59). An alternative explanation is that the dark lower end of the sheath symbolises the glans so that the penis, to an observer, is at rest with the ridges of the prepuce clearly indicated (Kelm 1966). Whatever the respective merits of these alternative explanations, one thing is clear, on a more mundane level of analysis, and that is that several of the features of these bamboo sheaths are not determined by the techniques of their manufacture. Certain of their elements, such as the nicks on the sides of the sheaths, have received no interpretation.

Symbolism. There are so few hints of any possible subconscious or unconscious meaning associated with the wearing of penis sheaths that we can attempt a short review of the available data. It is reported for the New Hebrides for example, that the removal of a person's penis wrapper is considered a deadly sin (Speiser 1923: 72) and amongst the Dani of New Guinea it is similarly considered especially insulting to cut off the top of a person's penis sheath (Harrer 1963: 34). Amongst the Gaika of South Africa anyone who removes a person's sheath is subject to a fine of up to five cattle. It is possible to interpret these few scattered remarks within the context of the feelings of nakedness, shame and modesty which have been mentioned above, or it is possible to assume, as does Le Roux (1948: 147) that the penis sheath in New Guinea is a symbol of erection, or even super-erection, whereby the end plume or fibre stopper represents either the glans or even semen. If this latter view is correct the symbolic implication of cutting off the end of a penis sheath appears obvious. It is also possible to see in the erect penis of those peoples who tie the prepuce under a waist belt an explicitly sexual statement regarding virility. For the Marind-Anim of New Guinea, Baal makes it clear that he interprets the raised penis with its shell in front of it as an overtly sexual symbol. According to Baal, the Marind-Anim initiate, with his symbolic erection and carefully covered buttocks, is presenting himself in the role of a homosexual. Similarly Baal finds echoes of identi-

fication with the neophyte in the adult use of pubic shells during some rites and he interprets several myths as reflecting classic castration anxiety (Baal 1966: 157, 950–1).

If we search the literature for any evidence of symbolic meaning to the wearing of penis sheaths then it may be significant that amongst the Tamberama of Upper Volta as we have seen, it is the female partner in a dance who may jokingly remove the sheath of one or two male dancing partners (Frobenius 1913: 323–4). There is really nothing in the literature to suggest that female involvement in this way reflects any significant symbolism of the penis sheath. It is only if we assume that anything to do with the male organ must have particular hidden meaning that we will automatically assume any deep symbolic significance from this dancing situation. The only other two examples from Africa which might suggest any deeper significance to the penis sheath concern the Zulu and the Thonga. Among the normal Zulu basketry sheath types there are numerous museum specimens characterised not only by their strikingly small apertures but also by being full of some brownish mixture (see plate 3). Museum catalogues state simply that these specimens (e.g. British Museum No. 3289) were taken from dead boys and 'filled with semen and cow-dung to promote fertility'. Semen also features in the Thonga example, for if the delivery of a baby is unduly long there is doubt about the child's legitimacy. The husband takes a little of his semen in his penis sheath, mixes it with water in a shell and gives it to his wife to drink. If legitimate, the child will 'feel his father' and delivery will be swift (Junod 1927: 40). In the Pacific area there are reports for New Caledonia of exchanges of sheaths by chiefs on the occasion of major feasts or peace-signing ceremonies (Sarasin 1929: 156), and in Malekula there is a possible vague association between a chief's sheath and the blood of animals (Deacon 1934: 363–5). For New Guinea, amongst the Kwoma, an initiate's penis cover is placed over a growing bamboo shoot as soon as the period of seclusion is finished. When the penis cover eventually splits the initiate, whose penis is supposed to have grown in size in the same way as the bamboo shoot, has reached adolescence (Whiting 1941: 66–7). Finally, there remains one further myth which mentions penis sheathing. One of the culture heroes of the Tukuna of Brazil dances with his penis free from his waistband and this causes the laughter of the 'girl from Umari' and her subsequent discovery hidden within a flute (Nimuendaju 1952: 127–8). There are no further indications of this kind in the literature to suggest any deep-seated general symbolic significance to the penis sheath, and even in the cases that we have seen any such symbolism is perhaps more likely to be focused on the semen than on the sheath itself. When we also remember the absence of any explicit statements from which one could infer any such meaning, the paucity of myths which deal explicitly with sheathing practices and the virtual absence of

transvestite use of the sheath, it is necessary to conclude at the very least that any deep symbolic meaning still remains to be demonstrated for the penis sheath.

Conclusions

I may perhaps conclude by asking what I have achieved by this review. It may be thought that I have tended to see a penis sheath in everything that I have looked at. This is a danger which is particularly liable when dealing with artistic representations²¹ but it is one which is perhaps an improvement over the situation in 1903, when Myres had to append a note to a 31 page long article on Cretan figurines (1902-3: 387), saying that he had received a letter subsequent to the writing of the article which suggested 'that what I have described as a "loin-cloth" may be a "Bantu sheath" of the type which is familiar on . . . figures of predynastic style in Egypt'. At the very least I have, I hope, managed to put some order into the existing literature on penis confinement practices.

Amongst the limited aims of this paper I hoped to show how by taking a series of material objects as a starting point, investigation leads into many spheres of anthropological interest. I have tried to show how taking a limited set of morphological criteria as a starting point allows cross-cultural comparisons in a way which exclusive insistence on wide function does not (see Leach 1967: xvi). I suggest that what we have seen is a situation where the same cultural solution, the confinement of the penis, has been adopted in many different cultures, both in the past and in the present, sometimes for the same reasons and sometimes for quite different ones. The same problem confronts all males in those societies which require that the penis or glans should normally be covered; a limited range of solutions to this problem exists but within the range of sheathing practices there is considerable room for individual preference. We have seen the range and variety of morphological types of penis sheaths. Within any particular culture the particular morphological type used by any individual often corresponds to his profession, age or status or, in some societies, it is the particular social situation which defines the particular qualities of the sheath which are appropriate to that situation. In some societies the morphology of the sheath is at its most simple, the tying of the prepuce over the glans, and there is little evidence to suggest that its primary function was anything but protective. In other societies, however, the morphological aspects of the sheaths are complex. We must note that the penis is very suitably shaped for the attachment of objects to it, and that considerable variety of practice has been represented in the record. There is evidence that these morphological possibilities have been used in many societies to attract attention to the wearer, and yet that this function is at the same time closely associated both with feelings of modesty and with the prevention of erection. The display aspect of sheathing practices

is perhaps not only connected with the technical possibilities of attaching appendages to the penis itself or to a penis sheath, but also to the fact that a penis sheath can be treated separately from any other article of clothing and can be easily associated with male qualities such as aggression and virility.

We must, I think, distinguish carefully between an individual's wish to wear a flamboyant article within the range allowed by accepted practices of propriety, rather as is the situation with the wearing of hats in western society today, and the existence of societies which might be called overtly phallic. From our review we see that penis sheaths in most societies have remarkably few phallic connotations and are, rather, symbols of modesty and decorum. This is perhaps not as surprising as it might at first sight seem to be, when we remember that most societies first adopt the penis sheath at or near puberty. The sheath is, in many of these cases, not simply a symbol of sexual maturity but one of social control of that sexuality. The penis sheath, in many instances, is not primarily a sexual symbol in itself but a visible sign of sexual restriction.

When we move to the morphological aspect of cross-cultural studies we have found that penis confinement by the use of some sheathing process is widespread and is found in restricted areas of different continents. By examining the details of their manufacture and the methods employed in actually putting them on, we have found that some sheath types are unique to a particular society and that others are shared by several societies. Where the forms are different there is no difficulty in accepting that they were independently invented whether for the same or for different purposes. Where a particular distinctive trait of penis sheathing is shared by several tribes who are in reasonably close proximity, for example the Brazilian tribes of the Colorado, Branco and Mequens rivers, who all attach their sheaths to a fold of skin produced by forcing the penis into the pubis, we can postulate diffusion and cultural contact as the explanation for the morphological similarity of the practices. Where the forms are the same in more than one continent, as are for example some of the practices in New Guinea, some Pacific islands and parts of South America, we must first note that these are primarily the forms which are morphologically the simplest. As has been long maintained in studies of material culture, the simpler the device the more likely it is to have been invented independently in more than one area. We do in fact have one recorded example of the tying of the penis, which must be accepted as a case of independent invention. Thus, Gould and Pyle (1901) record the relatively recent occurrence of a 'spontaneous retraction of the penis . . . of a peasant of twenty-three . . . which bodily disappeared and which was only captured by repeated effort. The patient was six days under treatment, and he finally became so distrustful of his virile member that, to be assured of its constancy, he tied a string

about it above the glans'. The morphologically simple devices of tying the prepuce over the glans or fastening the prepuce under a waist band have been found to characterise both whole societies and particular sections of societies. It is possible to argue that it is the very simplicity of these practices, the efficacy in protecting the glans against natural hazards as well as the relative ease of reversing the process of confinement, that make these forms of sheathing so suitable to the different requirements of the various societies.

I have maintained throughout this paper that a study of material culture opens up many areas of investigation of interest to a wide range of anthropological enquiry. I have attempted to deal with one aspect of penis sheathing only; the aspect most directly associated with the forms and social contexts of the sheaths themselves. I am well aware that a different dimension of social enquiry into penis sheathing could have been attempted; such a study would have examined sheathing practices within the wider context of cosmological beliefs, theories of conception and general attitudes to the human body.

In Melanesia, at least, such an approach would have been largely concerned with the general distinction between males and females and would have shown how these are often sharply distinguished symbolically both in taboos and ritual activities. Such a study, which would of course require exceptionally good and full data from particular societies, still remains to be undertaken.

All dimensions of social enquiry are, to my mind, of equal value and interest and I can do no better than to end this paper by quoting from Professor Daryll Forde (1959: 199): 'Sociological and ethnological explanations relate to different frames of reference. In contributing to our understanding of a custom or a total culture, each of them may provide partial, but only partial explanations at different levels. They can complement but cannot logically exclude one another. Ethnological explanations are concerned with the composition of particular culture patterns and the sources of their various components focus attention on the content of the custom. . . . Sociological explanations do not and cannot account for the specific content of the custom'.

NOTES

¹ This paper was delivered as the Curl Lecture of the Royal Anthropological Institute on 19 March 1970. I have left the style of this paper essentially unchanged, but I have considerably expanded the text to include as many data as possible and to incorporate references.

The following people allowed me access to museum collections or sent me information or photographs of museum specimens: Miss F. M. Barbour (Alexander McGregor Memorial Museum, Kimberley, South Africa); Mr D. Boston (Horniman Museum, London); Dr G. H. S. Bushnell (University Museum, Cambridge); Miss E. Carmichael (British Museum, London); Mr B. A. L. Cranstone (British Museum, London); Mr B. Fagg (Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford); Mr W. Fagg (British Museum, London); Mr V. Z. Gitywa (University of Fort Hare, South Africa); Miss D. Idiens (Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh); Mr J. Jarvis (Horniman Museum, London); Mr M. McLeod (University Museum, Cambridge); Miss E. M. Shaw (South African Museum, Cape Town); Mr C. A. Sizer (Wellcome Historical Museum, London).

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Different people have read all, or parts, of this manuscript and I cannot attempt to express what I owe them. At the very least I have taken up the time of the following: Dr J. Alexander, Dr R. Boyd, Mr B. A. L. Cranstone, Dr P. Fry, Dr J. P. Garlick, Professor I. M. Lewis, Mr H. S. Smith, Professor M. G. Smith and Dr R. Tringham. I am especially grateful to Mr A. Forge, Dr P. Kaberry, Dr P. Morton-Williams and Dr A. Rosenfeld, without whose assistance and time this paper would never have been completed.

On a personal note this is, as far as I can remember, my first paper to be published without the benefit of criticism and advice from my friend the late Dr R. Bradbury. I know that it would have been much improved had he been able to read it, and I wrote it with his memory constantly in mind.

² See note 9.

³ I cannot resist mentioning the various attempts to perform on these specimens in the mistaken belief that they were musical instruments.

⁴ As Briffault (1927: 292) has pointed out, painting and tattooing may sometimes be thought to act in the same way as clothing.

⁵ The possibly arbitrary nature of this definition is shown by, for example, the cases of 1) the Awa of New Guinea who wear a tight-fitting corset fastened around the hips which holds the penis tightly between the legs (Sorenson & Gajdusek 1966: 159) and of 2) Santa Cruz where males wear a belt with a woven or barkcloth mat tied up at the front and back under a belt, thus also anchoring the penis and scrotum (Speiser 1919: 185).

⁶ We may, I suggest, adopt the term 'phallocrypt' for devices which simply conceal the penis but do not closely sheathe it. It is perhaps interesting to note that within the same tribe the same object may or may not be used as a phallocrypt, seemingly according to whim, thus Seligmann (1906: 66) records that Toro men (New Guinea) sometimes wear a simple waist band, sometimes a waist band with a shell suspended on the side of the body and sometimes a waist band with the shell suspended centrally covering the vertical penis.

The 1904-5 expedition to south-west New Guinea drew attention to these morphological distinctions: the shell sheath is not attached to the waist band but to the penis itself; the phallocrypt is a small shell (excluding the plaque) whereas the sheath is a large shell (Zuid-West Nieuw-Guinea-Expeditie 1908).

It is unfortunate that much of the available literature fails to distinguish or specify between shell phallocrypts and shell sheaths. In several cases this distinction can be established from photographic records, but a large element of uncertainty remains for many other cases. Only definite cases of shell *sheaths* have been entered on the distribution maps and it is therefore possible that their frequency is in reality greater than that indicated.

⁷ This is again, in one sense at least, an arbitrary categorisation for although justified on grounds of morphology the use of phallocrypts is often subject to the same rules and social conditions as is the use of sheaths (e.g. Purari Delta (Chauvet 1930: 101-2)).

Some people have opted to extend the organ with some attachment usually in the form of a pin or ring (e.g. see Brown 1874). Penis pins are excluded from this investigation for these penetrating devices in no way sheath the organ, they are not designed to confine the penis and they do not cover it. These 'piercing' devices, I am assured by Dr R. Needham, have 'no connexion with penis sheaths as far as intention and effects are concerned'.

Where rings, simple circular objects of bone, ivory or metal, are used to fasten the prepuce over the glans they are included in this investigation; circular objects with roughened surfaces of varying penetration which fit over the penis root and do not serve to sheath the glans or confine the penis are excluded from this investigation.

⁸ There are a few exceptional cases, such as the Utakwa and Unkia of New Guinea, where the penis sheath is also extended to cover the scrotum (e.g. Karius & Champion 1928: 91).

⁹ Many of the previous attempts to assess the distribution of penis sheaths are partial and include many faulty bibliographical references. I make no excuse, therefore, for drawing up here a bibliography of the more important sources dealing with the confinement of the *glans penis*.

AFRICA

Ankermann 1905; Barrow 1801; Baumann 1938; Baumann and Westermann 1948; Botha 1924; Briesen 1914; Brussaax 1907; Bryant 1929; Bryant 1949; Cook 1931; Delafosse 1931; Delegorgue n.d.; Duggan-Cronin 1935; Duggan-Cronin 1939; Engelbrecht 1936; Fournau 1938; Fritsch 1872; Frobenius 1898; Frobenius 1913; Froelich 1949; Froelich, Alexandre and Cornevin 1963; Goody 1962; Haan 1897; Hunter 1961; Johnston 1897; Junger 1926; Junod 1927; Kay 1833; Kirk-Greene 1958; Kohler 1933; Krige 1936; Kropf 1889; Kuper 1947; Labouret 1931; Landor 1907; Lebeuf 1936; Leiris 1934; Lembezat 1961; Lestrangle 1955; Ley 1947; Louw 1938?; Luschan 1900; Maclean 1858; Marwick 1940; Mathews 1917; Meek 1925; Meek 1931; Moodie 1835; Muraz 1928; Muraz 1932; Ogilby 1670; Palmer 1922-3; Paulme and Brosse 1956; Potgeiter 1955; Rachewiltz 1968; Rattray 1932; Reeve 1912; Schapera and Goodwin 1937; Soga 1931; Sousberghe 1954; Sparrman 1786; Techer 1933; Tessman 1923; Tessman 1934; Tharaud & Tharaud 1922; Tooke 1962; Tremearne 1912a; Tremearne 1912b; Tyler 1891; Vaillant 1796; Wilson-Haffenden 1930.

NEW GUINEA

Austen 1947; Baal 1966; Beaver 1920; Behrmann 1922; Bijlmer 1922; Bijlmer 1923; Bijlmer 1934; Brøk 1911; Bruijn 1915; Campbell 1938; Champion 1932; Chauvet 1930; Cheesman 1941; Chinnery n.d.; Comrie 1877; Davies 1969; E 1911; Finsch 1888; Fischer 1913; Friederici 1912; Gardner and Heider 1969; Haddon 1894; Haddon and Layard 1916; Harrer 1963; Heider 1969; Holmes 1902; Karius 1929; Karius and Champion 1928;

Kelm 1966; Kienzle and Campbell 1937-8; Kock 1912; Kooijman 1962; Landtman 1927; Landtman 1933; Le Roux 1948; Matthiessen 1963; Murray 1918; Neuhaus 1911; Nevermann 1940; Nouhuys 1910; Nouhuys 1912; Nouhuys 1913; Papuan Annual Report 1919-20 1921; Papuan Annual Report 1920-21 1922; Papuan Annual Report 1921-22 1923; Papuan Annual Report 1924-25 1926; Papuan Annual Report 1927-28 1929; Poch 1907; Pospisil 1963a; Pospisil 1963b; Preuss 1899; Rawling 1911; Rawling 1913; Reche 1913; Reisenfeld 1946; Roesicke 1914; Sande 1907; Seligmann 1906; Seligmann and Strong 1906; Simpson 1963; Sorenson and Gajdusek 1966; Staal 1913; Stirling 1943; Thurnwald 1914; Ven 1913; Villematin & Villematin 1964; Whiting 1941; Willey 1966; Williams 1936; Wirz 1922; Wirz 1924; Wirz 1928; Wollaston 1912; Wollaston 1914; Zuid West Nieuw-Guinea Expeditie 1904-5 1908.

PACIFIC ISLANDS

Biggs 1960; Buhler 1935; Cameron 1964; Chinnery n.d.; Cranstone 1961; Deacon 1934; Finsch 1886; Finsch 1914; Friederici 1913; Glaumont 1889; Graebner 1909; Haddon 1893; Hamlyn-Harris 1912; Kruseustern 1813; Labillardiere 1802; Layard 1942; Layard 1961; Lisiansky 1968; Mead 1942; Mead 1968; Mead 1969; Miklucho-Maclay 1878; Moncelon n.d.; Moseley 1876; Nevermann 1934; O'Reilly and Poirier 1959; Parkinson 1901; Parkinson 1907; Reclus 1879; Rivers 1914; Sarasin 1929; Somerville 1894; Speiser 1919; Speiser 1923; Speiser 1933; Speiser 1934; Thilenius 1903; Waitz 1859.

AMERICA

Albisetti & Ventuselli 1962; Andree 1889; Barradas 1954; Becher 1955; Becher 1960; Buschau 1922; Caspar 1952; Caspar 1953; Caspar 1956; Caspar 1956-8; Catlin 1967; Crocker 1969; Dengler 1927; Dreyfus 1963; Freitas 1926; Fric and Radin 1906; Friederici 1912; Haseman 1912; Horton 1948; Huxley 1957; Huxley & Copa 1965; Karsten 1926a; Karsten 1926b; Karsten 1935; Kirchhoff 1948; Kissenberth 1922; Koch-Grünberg 1910; Koch 1932; Koenigswald 1908; Krause 1911; Lévi-Strauss 1936; Lévi-Strauss 1948a; Lévi-Strauss 1948b; Lévi-Strauss 1948c; Lévi-Strauss 1948d; Lévi-Strauss 1948e; Lévi-Strauss 1964; Lipkind 1948; Lowie 1948; Markham 1878; Maybury-Lewis 1967; Métraux 1938; Métraux 1942; Métraux 1948a; Métraux 1948b; Métraux 1948c; Métraux 1948d; Métraux 1948e; Métraux 1948f; Nimuendaju 1914; Nimuendaju 1924; Nimuendaju 1948a; Nimuendaju 1948d; Nimuendaju 1948e; Nimuendaju 1948f; Nimuendaju 1952; Nimuendaju and Métraux 1948; Nordenskiöld 1922; Nordenskiöld 1924; Polykrates 1962; Polykrates 1969; Preuss 1929; Ruef 1967; Schmidt 1912; Schmidt 1913; Steinen 1885; Steinen 1886; Steinen 1894; Steward 1948; Steward & Métraux 1948; Stone & Balser 1967; Tessman 1930; Turner 1969; Wagley and Galvao 1948a; 1948b; Zerries 1964.

¹⁰ I owe this reference to Mr B. Burt (University College London).

¹¹ It is instructive to compare the supposed extent of gourd sheath distribution in New Guinea according to the dates of the different surveys—cp. Sande, Friederici, Haddon and Layard, Le Roux, Reisenfeld (see Note 9).

¹² Accurate plotting of the South African distribution is impossible; the literature includes a multiplicity of tribal, linguistic and general names which defies accurate location to a particular geographical area. Furthermore, museum collections contain labelled specimens of types which according to the published literature were not found amongst the tribes from which the specimens are said to be derived.

¹³ See note 8.

¹⁴ This is a claim also made for ancient Greece on the basis of a study of representations, but convincingly rejected by Dingwall (1925).

¹⁵ Since that article was published a figurine in the Ashmolean Museum (no. E14466a) has come to light which is said to derive from the Archaic tomb of Zer at Abydos (this attribution apparently made by Margaret Murray). There can be no doubt of the striking similarities between this Ashmolean figurine and those featured in Ucko and Hodges (1963: no. 28e; see also Ucko 1968: nos. 139-143); in fact all six figures could well have been made by the same hand. The unfortunate break on the Ashmolean figure makes it impossible to determine whether or

not it was shown with a penis sheath or whether, like the others, it was shown with erect penis surrounded by white-painted pubic hair. If the Ashmolean Catalogue ascription is accepted, the other five figurines must also be considered genuine (but see Ucko & Hodges 1963: 208, 211, 213) and the whole group would then be the only examples known of figurines from the Archaic period of Egypt.

¹⁶ See Blackman & Apted (1953: 15–17) for other possible Egyptian examples.

¹⁷ Much of the obscurity of several interpretations of these two texts rests on two main assumptions; that the Egyptians themselves did not wear penis sheaths, and that there is an inevitable connexion between the wearing of a sheath and the practice of circumcision (but see Hölscher 1955: 14, 35; Wainwright 1962: 92).

¹⁸ One interesting line of enquiry would be to investigate any

possible relationship between the use of male sheaths and the absence of female contraceptive practices.

¹⁹ The use of the kynodesme by the Mandans may be viewed either as a reflection of the mode of 'dress' before the adoption of the loin cloth, or as an integral part of sexual abstinence before and during the performance of rites (personal communication, B. Burt).

²⁰ C. Aldred (personal communication) tells me that a fragmentary statue of the time of Rameses II in the Alexandria Museum shows the same sheath.

²¹ A temple image from Hawaii (Hiroa 1957: fig. 308e) is in fact shown with erect penis but without a waist belt. On analogy with several South American carvings and the stone figure from the Huon peninsula (see above) this *could* be interpreted as the representation of a sheathing practice, but there is, to my knowledge, nothing to confirm such an interpretation.

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Ankh-Sign, Belt and Penis Sheath

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
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CANKH-SIGN, BELT AND PENIS SHEATH


by

John B a i n e s

Writing sixty years apart Jéquier¹ and Fischer² both concluded that the origin of the *cnh*-sign was not in an object of practical utility but in a bow of purely amuletic character. For almost a century there have also been attempts to identify the sign with some known article, but no definitive solution to the problem has been found, and the true origin may well be lost. However, just as in the early centuries A.D. the sign became adapted to the Christian form of the cross, perhaps helped by the  monogram,³ its very simplicity has allowed analogies to be found between it and objects of everyday use - such as mirrors⁴ - and modern scholars from Sayce⁵ to Westendorf⁶ have compared it with a covering for the genitals, worn primarily by men. In this latter case the analogies are so various as to preclude a simple identification of one form of the garment with the sign. This suggests that the posited

¹ Les talismans  et  , in: BIFAO 11, 1914, 121-43, esp. 134.

² Some emblematic uses of hieroglyphs with particular reference to an archaic ritual vessel, in: Metropolitan Museum Journal 5, 1972, 5-15; id., An eleventh dynasty couple holding the sign of life, in: ZÄS 100, 1973, 26; cf. already id., The cult and nome of the Goddess Bat, in: JARCE 1, 1962, 12.

³ Cf. e.g., M. Cramer, Das altägyptische Lebenszeichen im christlichen (koptischen) Ägypten, Wiesbaden 1955, 10, fig. 7.9; Cramer (o.c., 49-52) believes that the 'life' notion is the most important factor in the Christian use, but that the cross (which does not become general as a symbol before the fourth century) also plays a part. She does not seem to attach any weight to the monogram, whose relatively late appearance might, however, be related to that of the  in


Coptic symbolism. See also Michaelides, Vestiges du culte solaire parmi les chrétiens d'Egypte, in: BSAC 13, 1948-9, 1951. 43-55.

⁴ Jéquier, in: BIFAO 11, 1914, 129-31; see also Schäfer, Die Ausdeutung der Spiegelplatte als Sonnenscheibe, in: ZÄS 68, 1932, 1-7; below p.22.


⁵ In: W.M.F. Petrie, Medum, London 1892, 33.

⁶ Beiträge aus und zu den medizinischen Texten, in: ZÄS 92, 1966, 151-4.

identification, although correct, might be not so much the origin of the sign as a fairly common linking of garment and sign. From this it would not be possible to deduce with certainty anything about origins unless there were further arguments, although a meaning which was attributed socially by the Egyptians might of course be a memory of the correct origin. However that may be (see also below, *passim*), my present purpose is to discuss visual analogies between belt, penis sheath and *ḥnḥ*-sign,⁷ which, I believe, strongly support an extended form of Westendorf's hypothesis, but only insofar as the analogies seem to have been explicit to some Egyptians of the historical period. Some of the material appears not to have been touched either in the extensive literature on the *ḥnḥ*-sign⁸ or in recent studies of the penis sheath.⁹ The existence of further documentation is the only justification for returning to the subject, since Jéquier's excellent study of 1914 already contains most of what can be said on a descriptive level.

In explaining the sign as a covering for the genitals Westendorf assumed that, on the analogy of the 'Isis-knot', the loop at the top was a later addition, enabling the wearer to hang the sign as an amulet (as on the example Kofler-Truniger no. A 31¹⁰). Therefore the knot at the waist of the original wearer would be the horizontal band of the sign, and the hanging part the one or two strips: . It is, however, possible to view the sign the other way up. In this manner it can be seen as a penis sheath, with the loop approximating to the *glans* visible through the garment, and the side elements perhaps the ends of a separate strip

⁷ Jéquier, in: BIFAO 11, 1914, 133, with n. 2, states that Cameron suggested that the *ḥnḥ*-sign might be an 'appareil protecteur' for the penis. Cameron in fact says that '[the *ankh* symbol] is represented by the loin cloth ...' (in M.A. Murray, The tomb of two brothers, Manchester 1910, 44). This opinion was no doubt derived from Sayce's (above, n. 5).

⁸ Cf., in addition to the material cited, Schäfer, Das sogenannte "Blut der Isis" und das Zeichen "Leben", in: ZÄS 62, 1927, 108-10; id., Djed-Pfeiler, Lebenszeichen, Osiris, Isis, in: Fs Griffith, 424-31; Volten, Das ägyptische -Zeichen, in: AcOr 25, 1960, 305-31; M. Erler, Das Symbol des Lebens im alten Ägypten, München, ORA Verlag 1966; Staehelin, Tracht, who characterises the problem of the origin of the *ḥnḥ* as an 'alte Streitfrage'; Barta, Der Königsring als Symbol zyklischer Wiederkehr, in: ZÄS 98, 1970, 6, n. 14, who endorses Westendorf's view; Derchain, Anchzeichen, in: LdÄ 1/2, 1973, 268-9.

⁹ P.J. Ucko, Penis sheaths: a comparative survey, in: Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute ... for 1969, London 1970, 27-67; Wildung, Two representations of gods from the early Old Kingdom, in: Miscellanea Wilbouriana 1, 1972, 154-6.

¹⁰ H.W. Müller, Ägyptische Kunstwerke, Kleinfunde und Glas in der Sammlung E. und M. Kofler-Truniger, Luzern, MÄS 5, 1964, 29, with plate; photo also in Fischer, in: Metropolitan Museum Journal 5, 1972, 14, fig. 20.

used to tie the loop. As a sheath for, or rather symbolising, an erect penis, the 'sign' would then be the right way up, particularly from the point of view of the wearer (see also below p. 19). There is sparse but cogent evidence for so interpreting some examples of penis sheaths that resemble each other sufficiently to be called a type. It will be necessary to treat them fairly fully.

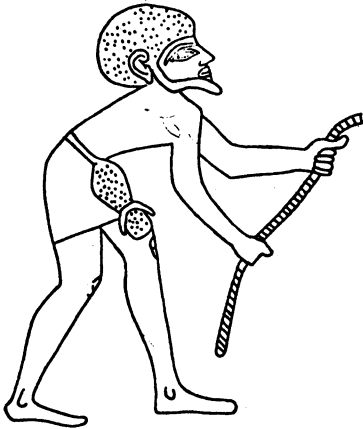


figure 1

The first case is the decoration worn by the two attendants of the fantastic animals on the recto of the NaCrmr palette (fig. 1¹¹). On present evidence the date of this is as early as any example of the Cⁿh-sign, but new material could change the picture. The object is evidently added to a kilt, whose line can be seen at the knees, and is thus symbolic or ornamental rather than functional.¹² By analogy with the representation of hair (or a wig) on the figures' heads, the main part of the object may be deduced to be of fur; its form will

be that of a conical tube tied towards the end by a separate element, presumably not of fur, whose loose ends hang slightly downwards. The fact that this earliest example is not functional suggests that later cases will be liable to assume relatively free forms, especially as the context of its occurrence is not such as to indicate that it was worn by normal people.

¹¹ Tracing from K. Lange - M. Hirmer, *Ägypten/Egypt*⁴, München 1967/London 1968, pl. 4.

¹² In view of this example and the poor attestation of sheaths on private individuals it is necessary to view with scepticism the possible cases of a sheath worn underneath another garment, adduced by Wildung, in: *Miscellanea Wilbouriana* 1, 1972, 154. It would be curious to wear such an explicit garment in a concealed position. For a parallel cf. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer religion*, Oxford 1956, 181, quoted, with extended implications, by T.O. Beidelman, *Some Nuer notions of nakedness, nudity and sexuality*, in: *Africa* 38, 1968, 123. The remark is not Beidelman's, as Ucko states, in: *PRAI* 1969, 52.

Further 'symbolic' examples of sheaths are those worn by Libyan women: Borchardt, *Ša3hu-re*^c II, pl. 1; 3 examples, bottom L, top L, bottom and middle registers (figures without beards, middle register damaged). Ucko's citation of a garment worn by the women of a Chad tribe (*ibid.*, 47-8) is surely irrelevant in this context.

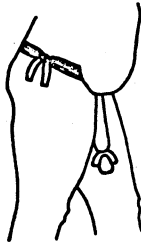


figure 2a

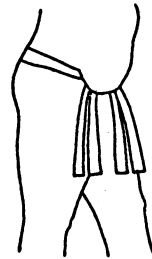


figure 2b

Between this case and the fifth dynasty there is a gap in attestation, except for a rather doubtful case discussed below. All remaining occurrences are on fecundity figures ('Nile gods'). The first such are on figures from the pyramid temple of Saḥure^C (fig. 2a¹³). The form is broadly similar to that on the Na^Crmer palette, but the detail is insufficient for any deductions as to material composition. As with the Na^Crmer figures, the overlapping of the small strips near the end over the main conical tube suggests that they are a distinct element. In both cases the object is far too big to delineate the shape of a real penis; although penis sheaths of comparable an larger size are known, they do not tend to mimic closely the form of a penis.¹⁴ An example from the temple of Neferirkare^C,¹⁵ formally unremarkable, is the only one with the original colour preserved. The main sheath is red and the tie with the dangling strips (which do not follow the contour of the loop) green. This might suggest that the sheath was of animal origin - leather or fur - and the tie of a vegetable material; but although this would fit with the Na^Crmer palette, the meaning of the colours could be entirely different.

¹³ Simplified tracing from Borchardt, *Ša3ḥu-re^C* II, pl. 29. A further example on an altar fragment from the pyramid temple (ibid. I, 50, fig. 52) gives no extra detail. The fragments are misleadingly arranged in the drawing.

¹⁴ Cf. many of the examples in Ucko, *PRAI* 1969, plates; see also K.G. Heider, *Attributes and categories in the study of material culture: New Guinea Dani attire*, in: *Man N.S.* 4, 1969, 379-91.

¹⁵ Borchardt, *Nefer-īr-ke3-re^C*, 29, fig. 29.

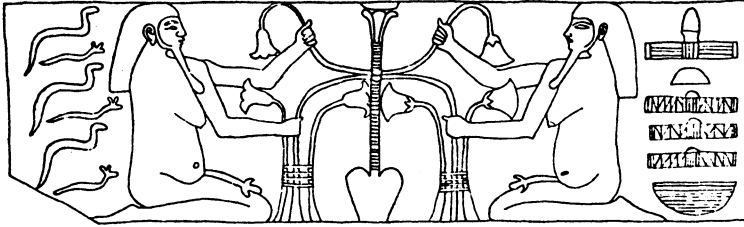


figure 3

Examples on seated figures from the pyramid temples of Sahure^C and Neuserre^C (fig. 3¹⁶) show an interesting variation. In both cases the strips near the end hang away from the main part of the sheath at about 70°. Since the sheath is more or less flat in a seated position gravity is presumably not forcing them to hang down round the circular end of the garment; thus the strips are neither of a rigid material, nor intended specifically to follow the contour of the end of the sheath. The form is closer to the ^Cnh-sign than that on standing figures.

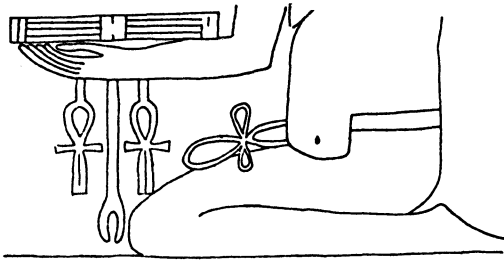


figure 4


The latest example known to me is also the most explicit and informative; it is on a seated figure of H^Cpj on BM 1346, a stela of the reign of Amenemhat V (fig. 4¹⁷). This garment, if placed vertically, resembles an ^Cnh-sign very closely. As is natural in a relief of elaborate execution, it is decorated with extra ornamental detail which makes it seem


padded out - as, for example Renaissance co-pieces were. The ^Cnh-signs

¹⁶ Tracing from Borchardt, Ne-user-re^C, pl. 16. This plate is almost completely retouched, so that the reproduction cannot claim great accuracy. Sahure^C: Borchardt, Sa3hu-re^C II, pl. 24

¹⁷ Tracing from enlargement. Photo: British Museum, A guide to the Egyptian collections, 1909, pl. 28; A general introductory guide to the Egyptian collections in the British Museum, 1930, 330, fig. 176; Baines, The inundation stela of Sebek-hotpe VIII, in: AcOr 36, 1974, fig. 4 after p. 54. The drawing in BM Stelae IV, pl. 22 is inaccurate in a number of respects.

The standing figure in Naville, Tb. I, pl. 28, no. A.p., might be thought to contain a reminiscence of the penis sheath. Examination of the original reveals, however, that the figure, which is damaged, is a fecundity figure wearing the normal fecundity figure belt (pBM 9949).

hanging from the adjacent offering-table are not dissimilar - within the naturally more rigid shape used - and share the very thick lower part, divided into two as in many examples of the sign. Whether the form as a penis sheath is meant to resemble the archaic version with two separate vertical strips, also found in a Middle Kingdom coffin frieze which cannot be very distant in time,¹⁸ is not clear; the width could be explained as functional or as a more or less symmetrical element to the front loop.¹⁹ It is also possible that the generously looped side pieces relate to the loops on , which were preserved throughout Egyptian history, rather than those on early *ꜥnh*-signs; they could, indeed, be freely invented. It seems most plausible to assume that an archaic form is behind the sheath.

Since the earlier form of the penis sheath as worn by fecundity figures does not immediately call to mind the *ꜥnh*-sign, and that on the thirteenth dynasty stela is more than a simple elaboration of the earlier shape, one must assume that another model was used, or that the designer produced his own shape.²⁰ The elliptical shape of the loops on the side pieces is much nearer circular than on any example of  as a hieroglyph, although it is more than paralleled in the next example of a sheath to be discussed. It could perhaps be understood as an 'ideal' elaboration of the looping found, for example, in the first dynasty vessel published by Fischer.²¹ On BM 1346 the garment is not a plausible sheath, since the tie in it would appear to come roughly in the middle of the penis and not near the *glans*, and the whole object is

¹⁸ Reproduced in Jéquier, in: BIFAO 11, 1914, 123, fig. 9. A later example is in the decoration of a catafalque from the second intermediate period: J.J. Tylor, The tomb of Sebeknekht, London 1896, pl. 2 = Schäfer, Principles of Egyptian art, Oxford 1974, pl. 24.1/40. A case on a Buhen rock drawing (Smith, The rock inscriptions of Buhen, in: JEA 58, 1972, 49, no. 23 = pl. 25.1, fig. 8.7) and contemporary occurrences on the stelae Philadelphia E 10983, 10989 and one further must be of comparable date. The clustering of examples at one site suggests that the form is a local variant; why it should occur in this particular place is a matter for speculation. - See also below, p. 22.

¹⁹ It cannot be assumed that the lower half of the archaic form is solid with an opening at the bottom, as such an object would be shown with a horizontal line joining the two verticals. Cf. Schäfer, Principles, 266, fig. 281/263.

²⁰ The form of fig. 1 is a better starting point for BM 1346 than that of fig. 2a, but still it is scarcely close enough to the hieroglyph to have suggested the modification without separate knowledge of the connection.

²¹ In: MMJ 5, 1972, 5-15.

too large.²² Like most known forms, it was probably devised at a time when real penis sheaths were no longer worn in Egypt. The resemblance to an ^cnh-sign, sounter to nature, is thus probably the creation of an artist who knew that sign and sheath were associated and that fecundity figures could wear a sheath, but did not know its real shape; so he showed something resembling the sign as closely as possible. But if he thought that sign and sheath were in some way equivalent, it does not follow that he considered the sheath to be the origin of the sign, or vice versa. Why the sheath resembles a form of the sign found principally in the first two dynasties remains an enigma.

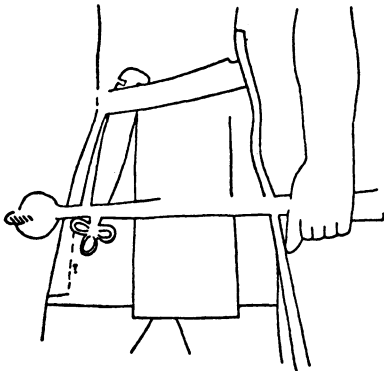


figure 5

After the more or less unequivocal cases of sheaths, a problematic one may be discussed. This is on a figure of Djoser from the series of relief panels in the step pyramid and south tomb (fig. 5²³). The clear penis sheaths in the relief series (below p.12) provide the justification for assuming that a king could wear the garment. Here the shape of the tip of the dagger stuck in the king's belt is extremely close to that of the penis sheath in BM 1346 and, interestingly, resembles

the other instances of the type less clearly. The placing of the dagger

²² If the practicalities of wear were ever considered the whole penis was probably imagined to fit into the tube part of the sheath, and the pompom was a decorative appendage.

The overall shape of the sheath is similar to that of most other variants known; the narrowing and flaring at the bottom is obviously likely to be in imitation of the natural form of a penis. It should be noted that the scrotum is mostly ignored in pictures of penis sheaths. It is, however, found on a few late pre-dynastic reliefs (e.g. Gebel el-^cAraq Knife: Asselberghs, Chaos, pl. 41; 'Beirut palette' [authenticity doubtful], *ibid.*, pl. 104) in forms that are representationally very striking. The later absence of this detail suggests that the sheath was shown more schematically in the dynastic period.

²³ Tracing from Firth - Quibell, Step Pyramid II, pl. 17. This and the remaining tracings from the volume (fig. 7-8) suffer from the poor definition and awkward lighting of the originals, and much in them is tentative. They are temporary expedients in default of line drawings of the reliefs themselves.

A parallel to fig. 5, without the looped decoration at the end, is on a relief of Mentuhotpe III: Wolf, Kunst, 361, fig. 306. Here as on the Djoser figure, the attributes of *mks* and mace are an index of the king's divinity, cf. AcOr 36, 1974, 38-54, esp. n. 24.

at precisely the same point on the figure's kilt as a sheath would come makes it virtually certain that the formal allusion is intentional. What cannot be decided from the relief alone is whether what is shown is the dagger itself or its sheath. The latter is more probable, simply because no real dagger would be of that shape. It is also easier to explain the variation with the companion relief,²⁴ which does not show this detail, if the dagger is assumed to be basically the same. No two of these reliefs are identical, but the pairs are basically similar; so variant sheaths are more likely than dagger and non-dagger. The implied symbolic equation: dagger sheath = penis sheaths is of great interest, and obviously suggests further that dagger = penis. It is, indeed, more logical to assume that the latter produced the former, both because sheaths are secondary to what they sheathe, and because - so far as I know - no further evidence for this equivalence of sheaths in Egypt can be adduced, whereas various *a priori* arguments may be made for the equivalence of the objects. Such associations are, of course, Freudian commonplaces, and the point cannot be gainsaid simply by saying that Egyptian evidence does not support it. What is relevant here is the question of how often and in what contexts the connection was explicitly acknowledged.²⁵ As a possible argument along these lines it may be noted that, except in martial scenes, daggers in the belt are rare as part of the royal insignia; they are, on the other hand fairly frequently attested both archaeologically²⁶ and iconographically for dead kings. Since rebirth to virility is a frequent motif the presence of the dagger on mummies and in funerary reliefs could be interpreted suitably as referring to the penis. No such allusion is, however, to be found in the decoration of dagger sheaths.

The fact that most examples of the sheath form under discussion are on fecundity figures has some implications worth discussing. It is not specific to one figure but to the genre, as is clear from the fact that

²⁴ Ibid., pl. 40. The sceptre and mace crossing the dagger may obscure the detail.

²⁵ For a parallel cf. Leach, Magical hair, in: JRAI 88, 1958, 147-64; Hallpike, Social hair, in: Man N.S. 4, 1969, 256-64; R. Firth, Symbols public and private, London 1973, 262-98.

²⁶ An obvious example is the mummy of Tutankhamun. The daggers are Carter obj. nos. 256k, 256dd. On the possible significance of iron in this context cf. Wainwright, Iron in Egypt, in: JEA 18, 1932, 13; id., The coming of iron, in: Antiquity 10, 1936, 12-13; E. Graefe, Untersuchungen zur Wortfamilie bj3, Köln 1971, 18-18.

it occurs with figures of various names: *šmꜥw* (fig. 2a), *t3-mḥjw*,²⁷ *ḥꜥpj* (BM 1346). It is therefore simplest to explain it as a rare early alternand for the belt with strips.²⁸ The reasons for such an alternation are unknown, but it should be noted that in all extant cases the figure with the sheath is the first or only one in its group, so that the evidence is consistent with the sheath's having a superior status to the belt with strips. A penis sheath both conceals and exhibits the penis:²⁹ the belt's main function is simply concealment. This is shown by the fact that, in cases where the form as depicted would in reality not conceal the penis, the penis is by no means always shown. Paradoxically, in a few cases where the penis is visible it would not in fact be seen (e.g. fig. 6³⁰). These examples confirm that figures

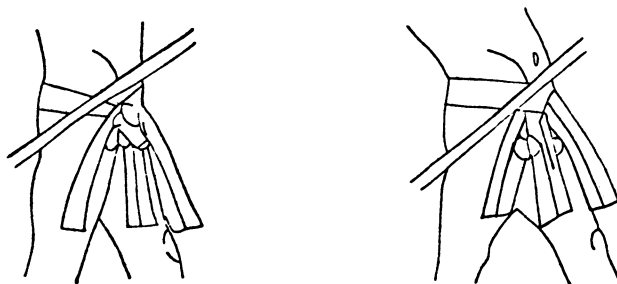


figure 6

²⁷ Fig. 3, the name being supplied by the plant held. The words *htpwt nbwt* and *ḏf3w* behind the two figures are not their names but the benefits they are implicitly bringing.

²⁸ The form of the belt with strips was being misunderstood or misinterpreted on fecundity figures by the fifth dynasty, cf. Westendorf, Amenophis IV. in *Urgottgestalt*, in: *Pantheon* 21, 1963, 275-6 (the 'königliche Nilgottstatuen' cited are not in fecundity figure form). This suggests that the later development occurs at a pictorial level, often without knowledge of the actual garment or its function. Consideration of the alternation of belt and sheath in this context should strictly therefore be confined to the Old Kingdom.

An indication of the degree to which garments that are relatively rare in certain contexts may be misunderstood is given by a pair of figures on a Middle Kingdom relief from Elephantine: Kaiser *et al.*, in: *MDAIK* 28, 1972, pl. 41 a; these have a belt with two strips in the form of penis sheaths (in addition to a loin cloth protecting the buttocks). The 'penis sheath' is in the 'standard' form, not that found on fecundity figures. The fact that the artist produced such a palpable absurdity suggests that he was unaware of the function of a penis sheath.

²⁹ Cf. examples cited by Ucko, in: *PRAI* 1969, *passim*.

³⁰ Tracing from Wresz., *Atlas* III, 52.

wearing the garment are not epicene³¹ or eunuchs.³² Cases where the genitals are paradoxically visible (which do not occur on fecundity figures, probably in part because the roll of fat below the belt conflicts with representing the genitals) are no doubt to be classed with the more general phenomenon of 'false transparency'.³³ At all events, the garment must in some respects be a polite substitute for the penis, and so meanings attaching to the penis - and *a fortiori* to the penis sheath - may also attach to it. The garment can be worn in addition to a kilt of another type,³⁴ which shows that it acquired a value of its own. The rather 'learned' character of the pieces on which this occurs does not suggest that this symbolism was widespread. But whatever these meanings may be, the occurrence of the belt on socially insignificant figures and its later near-eclipse show that it was not held in high esteem as a symbol. Similarly, fecundity figures are the lowest in status among non-human beings in Egyptian temple relief. Knowledge and use of the garment as a symbol were probably early or archaistic.

Restrictions in the symbolic range of the belt with strips should not be extended to the penis sheath. Different forms of the sheath may have different symbolic connotations, and deductions about the meaning of the object as worn by fecundity figures should not automatically be extended to the form worn, for example, by the statue Cairo CG 38068.³⁵ On grounds of status one would not necessarily expect fecundity figures to wear the same sheaths as major divinities, and in fact they do not.³⁶ The material relating to the penis sheath is inadequate for any proper typology.

³¹ As implied by Westendorf, in: *Pantheon* 21, 1963, 275.

³² Cf. F. Jonckheere, *L'eunuque dans l'Égypte pharaonique*, in: *Revue de l'histoire des sciences et leurs applications* 7, 1954, 145, and the remarks of Kadish, *Eunuchs in ancient Egypt?*, in: *Fs Wilson*, 58.

³³ Schäfer, *Principles*, 127 f. 121 f.

³⁴ E.g. Brooklyn 51.230, [J. D. Cooney], *Five years of collecting Egyptian art 1951-1956*, The Brooklyn Museum 1956, 30-31; pl. 55. Examples of this phenomenon on fecundity figures may always be mistakes, though on as carefully composed and executed a relief as MMA 25.6 (Hayes, *Scepter I*, 180, fig. 110) such a solution is very much a *pis-aller*.

³⁵ Daressy, *Statues de divinités*, 23; pl. 6.

³⁶ For another example of such distinctions cf. Gell, *Penis sheathing and ritual status in a west Sepik village*, in: *Man N.S.* 6, 1971, 165-81. Penis sheaths may carry them like any other form of clothing.

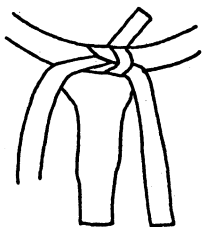


figure 7

The fecundity figure data are not the only ones relevant to the consideration of the *Cnh*-sign. There is also the possibility, examined by Westendorf, of 'reading' it the right way up on a figure. The statuette Brooklyn 58.192³⁷ shows a god wearing a penis sheath which may be interpreted in this way (fig. 7). Drawn out as a diagram, with the belt shown as a pair of lines, it gives five strands: $\Pi\Pi$. This might suggest that the loop on the sign was the belt itself, shown the only unambiguous way an Egyptian could,³⁸ and the straight side pieces would be the two

hanging strips of the garment, schematically straight. The prototype of such a form would be very close to fig. 7. But the alternative possibility of taking the top loop as an added element may find some confirmation in a rare form of the *Cnh*-sign, found on the stela Cairo CG 20038³⁹ and the British Museum stela of Tjetji⁴⁰: ⌘ . This form cannot be explained as a mistranscription from the hieratic,⁴¹ and so is likely to be a variant of the hieroglyph, however rare. The existence of these examples removes Jéquier's objection,⁴² already disregarded by several writers, that the 'stiff' side projections of the sign could not originate in the floppy strips of cloth of the belt. Whatever the explanation of the stiff projections, the floppy strips occur on the sign, and may be omitted in the standard form for a variety of reasons. The form also supports Fischer's suggestion that an early case of ⌘ is simply a variant of ⌘ , and to be read *Cnh*.⁴³ The form on the later stela may well be the product, from a palaeographical point of

³⁷ Wildung, in: *Miscellanea Wilbouriana* 1, 1972, 14-15; photo also in B.V. Bothmer - J. L. Keith, *Brief guide to the department of ancient art, The Brooklyn Museum* 1970, 24. Fig. 7 is traced from the latter.

³⁸ The non-circular form would be unexpected, but cf. below, p. 21.

³⁹ Most recently: H. Brunner, *Hieroglyphische Chrestomathie*, Wiesbaden 1965, pl. 8 (with bibliography).




⁴⁰ BM 614: PM I²/2, 596, no. 7. Here the sign reads *ms*. On the possible relevance of this cf. below n. 44.

⁴¹ Cf. the forms in Möller, *Paläographie* II, 51, no. 534.

⁴² In: BIFAO 11, 1914, 127-8.

⁴³ In: MMJ 5, 1972, 15. The validity of Fischer's assumption in his fig. 14 that

⌘ and ⌘ are the same object with the lateral strips turned different ways is doubtful. By his own admission it is contradicted by the vessel he publishes, as by other early examples, and it rests in any case on the hypothesis that the signs reproduce 'views' of what they represent.

view, of a fusion or confusion of  and ;  might also have influenced its shape.⁴⁴

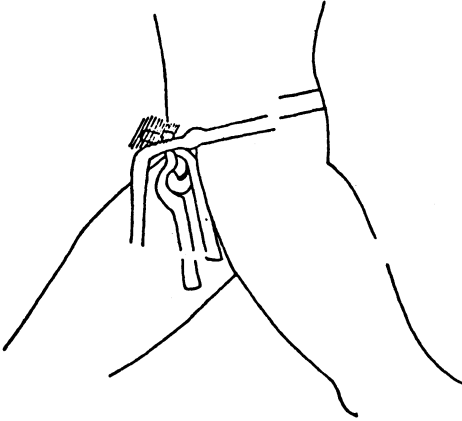


figure 8

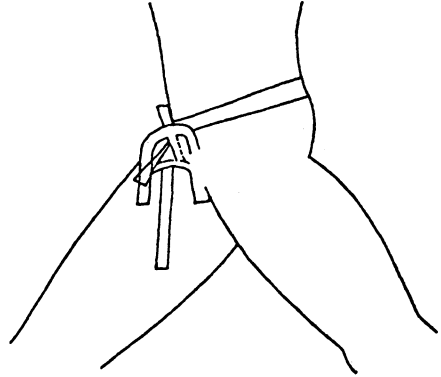



figure 9

The garment on Brooklyn 58.192 is probably the same as that worn by Djoser in two of the reliefs from the step pyramid complex (fig. 8-9).⁴⁵ In these there seems to have been an attempt to show the way in which the garment was fastened and attached to the penis. The detail is not free from inconsistencies,⁴⁶ so that it is hard to see what precisely was intended. The sheath is smaller than that on the statuette, and the scrotum is shown; these differences may be the result of an attempt to make the form on the statuette more impressive (see also above n. 22). There is one further hypothetical case of the garment on a king: the *k3*-statue of Awibre^c Hor.⁴⁷ In good colour photographs this shows clear traces of two outer strips in approximately the same positions as on

⁴⁴ The *ms*-sign , although strikingly similar in shape to the forms discussed and to the belt with strips, does not as far as I know alternate with any of them. It is made of fur (cf. Gardiner, EG 465 no. F. 31), as I suggest that the 'penis sheath' on the Na^crmer palette probably was.

⁴⁵ Tracings from Firth - Quibell, Step Pyramid II, pl. 15 (fig. 8). 42 (fig. 9). See also above, n. 23.

⁴⁶ Some of these may ultimately have been eliminated in plaster and paint.

⁴⁷ CG 259; cf. comments by Borchardt, *Statuen und Statuetten I*, 166, esp. n. 7. There are two nail holes above the penis, presumably for attaching another garment or part of the same one. For colour photographs cf. W. Westendorf, *Das alte Ägypten*, Baden-Baden 1968, 96; [S. Donadoni], *Egyptian Museum Cairo, London etc.* 1970, 80.

the Brooklyn statuette. The missing central part of the garment must be one of two: the normal belt with strips, or the penis sheath with strips. The belt makes no obvious sense and is not found on kings, whereas the sheath is known from the examples cited, and would obviously be appropriate. The Djoser reliefs show a ritual of regeneration in a mortuary context, and the same associations would be meaningful here. The divine wig on the statue also places it, along with all other representations of the royal *k3*, in a context more nearly divine than is normal for the king.⁴⁸ It is perhaps of relevance that one of the few other examples of a king in the divine wig is on the well-known statue of Djoser from the north side of the step pyramid.⁴⁹ The associations of the *k3* with sexual fertility should also be considered.⁵⁰

By analogy with the rare form of the hieroglyph it is possible to see in the Brooklyn statuette and parallel cases an allusion to the *cnḥ*-sign as a belt with strips to which a penis sheath has been added. Early *cnḥ*-sign appear to be made of a single piece of material,⁵¹ but already by the third dynasty forms are found that are evidently meant to consist of more than one piece.⁵² So it is perfectly legitimate to see an *cnḥ*-sign in a composite object of the same date.

Whichever of the views just suggested be adopted, the type on the Brooklyn statuette will pose a further problem: does the sheath itself or the belt provide the more important analogy with the sign? - and which comes first? The thicker vertical stroke is divided in careful examples, but it is none the less possible that an Egyptian could understand it as a sheath with some sort of decoration, rather like the bottom part of the one in BM 1346, with the rest as its necessary appurtenances. The alternative assumption, that the analogy is with the belt with strips, has an implication worth considering: this garment, which later has an independent formal history, might be a substitute for the penis sheath, in which the sheath, the central element, was replaced by one or more extra strips - or it might be the accompanying equipment without the sheath. The form of the garment must be briefly surveyed.

⁴⁸ Cf., for some, Barguet, *Au sujet d'une représentation du ka royal*, in: *ASAE* 51, 1951, 205-15. Note also that the royal *k3* is frequently shown in *sd*-festival contexts.

⁴⁹ E.g. Lange - Hirmer, *Ägypten/Egypt*⁴, pl. 16-17. This figure is in modified *sd*-festival clothing, cf. E. Hornung et al., *Studien zum Sedfest*, *AH* 1, 1974, 74.

⁵⁰ Cf. e.g. Barguet (n. 48 above); Helck, *Zu den theophoren Eigennamen des Alten Reichs*, in: *ZÄS* 79, 1954, 28; U. Schweitzer, *Das Wesen des Ka ...*, *ÄF* 19, 1956, 71-3.

⁵¹ Fischer, in: *MMJ* 5, 1972, 5-15

⁵² Firth - Quibell, *Step Pyramid II*, pl. 16 (personified *cnḥ*). 42 (*cnḥ* held by vulture).

It can have from one⁵³ to six (fig. 6⁵⁴) strips hanging down, although three and four are commonest. Where the number of strips is even they tend to separate into pairs (e.g. fig. 2b). The form with three strips, which cannot consist of only one piece of cloth unless the rendering is very schematic, is found already on the verso of the Na^Crmer palette.⁵⁵ Cases where two strips are shown could almost always be taken to be simplifications, as the two mostly align neatly on the thighs of the wearer.⁵⁶ The method of tying the central knot is scarcely ever shown in detail. The garment is almost always worn by relatively low-ranking figures, and its widespread use is confined to the Old Kingdom.⁵⁷ It is found very occasionally on deities.⁵⁸ Although it does not seem rigidly to define the status of its wearers, it is clear that this status is not high. There is a most striking form, found most clearly at Meir,⁵⁹ which is relevant for the argument here: a garment that is simply a strip of cloth looped at the waist with the two ends hanging forward, leaving the genitals exposed. Since the genitals of fecundity figures do not appear to be exposed, this disposition supports the assumption that a two-strip form is schematic. It looks very much as if the Meir variant lacks a further element to cover the genitals, and that the complete garment therefore consists of more than one part.

It can, therefore, be seen that, although the original of the belt with strips might be explicable on the lines of Barta's or Fischer's drawings,⁶⁰ it is more likely that most forms are more complex; otherwise the outer strips would have to be looped. The widespread presence of a tongue of material projecting above the belt is incompatible with an object made of a single strip of material. So it is a reasonable hypothesis that the central strip or strips might be a substitute for a penis sheath. The forms of the sheath itself that show analogies with the *ḥn*-sign are not worn with strips, and do not conflict with such

⁵³ E.g. von Bissing, *La chambre des trois saisons du sanctuaire du roi Rathourès* (V^e dynastie) à Abusir, in: *ASAE* 53, 1956, pl. 3 *d* after p. 338; Lacau - Chevrier, *Sésostriès I^{er}*, pl. 12. 27; Posener, *Première domination perse*, pl. 4.

⁵⁴ See above, n. 30; also Jéquier, *Pépi II*, I/2, fig. 1.

⁵⁵ In e.g. Lange - Hirmer, *Ägypten/Egypt*⁴, pl. 5.

⁵⁶ E.g. Posener, *Première domination perse*, pl. 5.

⁵⁷ In the New Kingdom it is worn in conjunction with a back piece probably of leather, covering the buttocks; e.g. Davies, *Rekh-mi-Re^C II*, pl. 39.

⁵⁸ Naville, *Deir el Bahari II*, pl. 55 (two examples); Calverley, *Abydos III*, pl. 10. 11.

⁵⁹ Blackman, *Meir II*, pl. 3 = 25.2. For other examples cf. Wresz., *Atlas I*, 405; *III*, 39B. 41.

⁶⁰ *ZÄS* 98, 1970, 6, fig. 5; *MMJ* 5, 1972, 13, fig. 14.

an association. The suppression of the sheath could be explained on grounds of status: the evidence for the garment in the dynastic period is singularly sparse, but it appears not to be worn by native Egyptians, being reserved for divinities, foreigners, and occasionally the king.⁶¹ Of these three categories only the foreigners are likely to have been seen wearing it. If this is accepted it may go some way towards explaining why the belt with strips, which produces the closest analogy with the C_{nh}-sign, is mostly worn by humble people, despite the fact that the main associations of the sign are with the divine sphere;⁶² after the two separated there would be a radical bifurcation in their contexts, and the garment without its original central part would have had slight value as a symbol. There is thus a substantial congruence between the restriction of sheath and C_{nh} to the divine and royal sphere.

Some support for the development sketched here can be found in detailed forms of the C_{nh}-sign and the belt with strips.

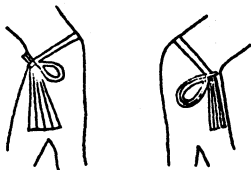


figure 10

As noted above, the C_{nh}-sign with two distinct elements appears in the third dynasty (and not the fourth, as stated by Fischer⁶³). In the early fourth dynasty there are several examples of a belt with strips which has a loop at the edge, in all cases the edge furthest from the body profile (fig. 10⁶⁴). It is possible to imagine a second loop on the other side of the garment. This may be the form that was behind

Sayce's original linking of belt and sign.⁶⁵ Details of the form and

⁶¹ Exceptions are the cases in the tomb of Senbi at Meir (Blackman, Meir I, pl. 7) and the el-Bersha *d3mw* pointed out by Wildung, in: MW 1, 1972, 154-5 with n. 49). Ucko's statement (in: PRAI 1969, 57) that sheath-wearing was 'widespread' is wrong; only for the predynastic period does the evidence he cites support it. Senbi's sheath is of interest as it could parallel fig. 1-4 in form; the belt is tied as in fig. 2a. It should be noted that all the examples on kings are funerary.





⁶² Cf. Derchain, in: LdÄ I/2, 1973, 168-9; RÄRG, 418-20; Fischer, in: ZÄS 100, 1973, 16-28.

⁶³ In: MMJ 5, 1972, 14. It does seem that examples with divided horizontal strips begin in the fourth dynasty, but this may be a question of the amount of detail on extant signs.

⁶⁴ Tracing from Wres., Atlas III, 92C. Other examples: Petrie, Medum, pl. 10-12. 18. 24. 28, 2. It is worth noting that a rather different looped garment is found on the Na^crmer palette: the main captive on the verso (Lange - Hirmer, Ägypten/ Egypt⁴, pl. 5) wears a belt with three looped strips hanging from it. The relevance of this here is doubtful.

The approximate form of fig. 9 is found in the sixth dynasty (Nina Davies - A. H. Gardiner, Ancient Egyptian paintings I, Chicago 1936, pl. 2). This is probably a chance survival, perhaps an archaism in the style of the fourth dynasty, as is found commonly at this time.

⁶⁵ In: Petrie, Medum, 33.

number of strips are variable. This type offers a particularly close analogy with the $^c n h$ with looped side pieces, and disappears shortly after the comparable form of the sign.⁶⁶ The equation of looped $^c n h$ and looped belt cannot, however, exhaust the analogies or provide the key to them, as the three-strip belt is found as early in relief (above, n. 55) and in three dimensions on a $h h$ -figure on a vase from the step pyramid.⁶⁷ The near-contemporary demise of the two is none the less in favour of the connection, and perhaps of its being explicitly acknowledged. Since no good later evidence can be produced it may be that it was lost soon after this period. It would be necessary here to assume that garment and sign related by way of the belt, which would be equivalent to the top loop of the sign; the side loops would be shown hanging down as in nature and not stiff as in the schematic hieroglyph.⁶⁸ This postulated association makes the garment and sign very closely related indeed to the 'Isis-knot'. The form of the $^c n h$ -sign with divided horizontal strips, concomitant with the indications of lashing at the middle, probably denotes a departure from origins and knowledge of them, and stylisation as an object used in ritual and symbolic contexts. Part of the stylisation would be meant to reinforce the distinction between  and . The use of the two seems to overlap in many contexts, and the reasons for the distinction, apart from the obviously less exclusive character of , are not clear. One difference should be noted between the associations of  as a sheath and a belt with strips: as a sheath the loop is integral to the analogy, but as a belt with strips it may be reduced to the strips with a simple 'handle', as in Westendorf's suggestion.⁶⁹ A conceivable allusion to the meaning of the belt with strips and the sheath may be seen in their occasional occurrence on Shu.⁷⁰ Shu is associated with $^c n h$ and Tefenet with $m3^c t$ (later $w3s$).⁷¹ Other explanations are, however, possible.

⁶⁶ It is possible that a single loop only was meant in the relief examples (i.e. the top loop, the belt being merely a support) but this would imply an implausible asymmetry in the garment.

⁶⁷ Firth - Quibell, Step Pyramid II, pl. 104, 1-2 seems to be over a kilt.

⁶⁸ By dividing the loops on a belt with strips a six-strip belt may be arrived at (fig. 5; above n. 30). This may be likened to the form of the sign with divided horizontals, again on the assumption that belt = top loop.

⁶⁹ In: ZÄS 92, 1966, 152.

⁷⁰ Cenotaph of Seti I, pl. 81; Mariette, Abydos I, pl. 39b. In view of the close relationship of $h h$ -figures and Shu the figure on the vase from the step pyramid may also be relevant (above, n. 67). See also pGreenfield, pl. 106.

⁷¹ Cf. Volten, in: AcOr 25, 1960, 317; E. Winter, Untersuchungen zu den ägyptischen Tempelreliefs der griechisch-römischen Zeit, DÖAW 98, Wien 1968, 85-8; Wildung, in: ZDMG 121, 1971, 120-21; Desroches Noblecourt, in: Mon. Piot 59, 1974, 6-8, n. 3.

Bonnet⁷² and Westendorf⁷³, remarking on the way in which gods hold the *ḥnḥ*-sign out to kings, with the loop facing the king, deduced that the lower part of the sign was considered especially significant. As the standardised form, from the third dynasty, is very much a unity, any such value attached to one part would be a hyper-archaism, doubtful in particular since the identification of sign and garment can be reserved to make the loop the most prominent part (the '*glans*' of the penis sheath).⁷⁴ At all events, other reasons could be imagined for holding the sign at the bottom, whether practical (the *ḥnḥ* may be meant ultimately to be held by the receiver, in which case it can conveniently be grasped⁷⁵), aesthetic, or other. It could, indeed, just as well be thought that the part pointing towards the recipient was held to be the most important.

To summarise, possible analogies discussed *ḥnḥ* and garments are: 1 with a particular form of penis sheath; 2 with a penis sheath and accompanying strips, two versions of the analogy being possible; 3 with the belt with strips, probably on the assumption that the top loop is either the belt or a secondary addition. It may, further, be suggested that garment 3 could be a version of 2 with the status-indicator removed and replaced by something more neutral. Among all the examples only BM 1346 is clear enough to constitute anything like proof of the association; but it supports the idea that the other analogies were meant. As almost all the data are from the Old Kingdom or earlier it must be doubted whether knowledge of the connection was widespread after about the fourth dynasty, and more than a piece of esoteric lore by the middle of the second millennium B.C.. One must agree with Fischer's implication that only very early forms of the sign can be cited as evidence of its origins;⁷⁶ but origins are not the entire issue, and the later material, even if wrong, is nearer to them than us and also tells us about the evolution of the sign's meaning in time. The latest allusions may of

⁷² RÄRG, 419.

⁷³ In: ZÄS 92, 1966, 152.

⁷⁴ Whether the Egyptians viewed the *glans* or the whole penis as an object of modesty is unknown; the existence of circumcising practices, the operation occurring at the onset of puberty and adoption of clothing, might favour the *glans*, but is not conclusive; cf. H. Sigerist, A history of medicine I, New York 1967, 243-4; de Wit, La circoncision chez les anciens égyptiens, in: ZÄS 99, 1972, 41-8; Ucko, in: PRAI 1969, 51.

⁷⁵ Cf. the groups of signs held by a king, e.g. Borchardt, Ne-user-re^C, pl. 16.

⁷⁶ In: MMJ 5, 1972, 14-15.

course merely be a later reinterpretation which happens to be correct in one modern writer's view. It should be reiterated that the evidence examined is insufficient to p r o v e any single origin for the sign. The fact that we may witness some of its evolution in the early dynastic period may, however, suggest that we are fairly near the beginning of its history; if the origin is in a single object, it may be one of those discussed.

Most of Jéquier's objections⁷⁷ to the identifications of ♀ reviewed in this article have been mentioned above, implicitly or explicitly. There remain to be considered his remarks on colour. The only coloured case of the penis sheath worn by fecundity figures is red with a green tie, while the belt with strips is mostly coloured white, exceptions often being explicable as symbolic colouring or as a function of colour patterning. These colours conflict with the generally blue *ḥnḥ*-sign,⁷⁸ the colour being attested in both two- and three-dimensional examples. There is no reconciling this difference, and it should not be assumed that the rare green indicates a vegetable origin.⁷⁹ On the view given above, that standardised fourth dynasty and later forms do not reflect the origin of the sign, the only reasonable assumption is that the colour is symbolic and not realistic. It is in particular noteworthy that Ω, with which Jéquier⁸⁰ and Barta⁸¹ connect the sign, is green.⁸² In the Egyptian system blue is the colour with the greatest

⁷⁷ In: BIFAO 11, 1914, 126-34.

⁷⁸ Listed Old Kingdom examples include 6 black, 5 blue and one each green and red (Smith, *Sculpture*, 368-74); black is probably a substitute for the as yet rare blue pigment. The paintings on the Boston coffin of Djehutinakhte include 7 black (two with white top loops) and 6 blue cases (E. L. B. Terrace, *Egyptian paintings of the Middle Kingdom*, London 1968, pl. 16. 17. 22. 23. 26. 27. 28. 31. 32. 37. 43; the blue signs are mostly larger and more carefully executed). Calverley, Abydos III-IV contains more than 50 blue *ḥnḥ*-signs in distinctive contexts; other colours occur among representations of furniture etc. (there is a certain amount of 'superfluous' blue colouring, perhaps because of the prestige of blue).



⁷⁹ Jéquier, in: BIFAO 11, 1914, 135.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 142-3.


⁸¹ In: ZÄS 98, 1970, 6.

⁸² E.g. Calverley, Abydos, *passim*.

symbolic prestige,⁸³ and it is unlikely that any specific reference could be found for it here, although many guesses can be made.





It is beyond the scope of the present article to consider in detail any possible links between the associations of the form of the sign and the use of the word *ḥnḥ*. One or two comments must suffice. Comparative material suggests that great caution should be taken in assigning sexual meanings to the use of penis sheaths and the like without evidence that they were acknowledged explicitly.⁸⁴ So the obvious reference of the garment should mostly be disregarded. It has virtually the same range of possible symbolic applications as any other garment. In the present case evidence for a sexual meaning will primarily be from the link between sign and garment; any extension of this must be based on further evidence that the penis was associated with the word *ḥnḥ*. Here there is the problem that the likely relation would be with the erect penis; this is not normally the referent of the penis sheath, which tends to prevent erection. I have, however, given minimal grounds for equating the sheath in some cases with the erect penis (above, p. 3). Any possible play on *ḥnḥ* and virility would be more or less 'learned' in character, as there is no evidence for widespread knowledge of it. An example of a learned allusion would be the alternation and virtual equivalence between *ḥnḥ* and *nfr* at el-Amarna (e.g. *nfr-ḥprw-rʿ > ḥnḥ-ḥprw-rʿ*). This may be paralleled in the occasional alternation of  and .

⁸³ H. Kees, *Farbensymbolik in ägyptischen religiösen Texten*, in: NAWG 1943, 466-7, remarks that blue plays no part in colour symbolism in texts (but cf. Harris, *Minerals*, 224-5). For pictures the point may seem obvious, and cannot be set out here. As an example of the primacy of blue one may cite the colouring of sets of fecundity figures: blue and green are complementary in earlier schemes, but blue always comes first, while in the Graeco-Roman period it seems to have superseded all other colours. Ransom Williams's reservations on symbolic applications of colour (The decoration of the tomb of Per-Neb, MMA New York 1931, 55) should be restricted to secular contexts. The interchange of blue and black (ibid. 53-8) is more plausibly explained as a by-product of the original scarcity of blue and possibly of colour terminology than of defective colour vision, as she suggests. The tests described appear to be tests of terminology as much as of vision.

The loop in the *ḥnḥ*-sign is white even on coloured backgrounds. As Jéquier concluded, this probably has a graphic and not symbolic significance; the convention applies to many signs that enclose blanks, even if the blank is not completely separate - as with . For examples cf. e.g. G. Thausing - H. Goedicke, *Nofretari*, Graz 1971, fig. 24. 97. 99. 105. 107.

⁸⁴ Indeed, it seems that the reverse is often true and that sheathing is sometimes a sign of confining or sublimation of sexuality - or may even go with a relative indifference to it (cf. Heider, in: *Man N.S.* 4, 1969, 379-91; Ucko, in: *PRAI* 1969, 49-57; Gell, in: *Man N.S.* 6, 1971, 165-81). See also above, esp. n. 25.

between a pair of *wḏ3t*-eyes at the tops of stelae.⁸⁵ By way of the meaning 'penis' for *nfrw*⁸⁶ one might arrive at a sexual association for *ḥnh*. Further evidence for this may be seen in a cryptogram of Tutankhamun, where the ithyphallic form of Amun apparently reads *twt-ḥnh-jmnw* and is equivalent to the seated Amon-re^c holding an *ḥnh*-sign.⁸⁷ *twt* describes both figures, as they are standard images, so that the penis as the odd element should read *ḥnh*. All this could, at a very great remove, be confirmed by the designation of the penis as *ḥw-ḥnh* found in Graeco-Roman period texts.⁸⁸ But tenuous links of this sort are very little in the way of evidence, when the dominant association of *ḥnh* is normally air, as can be seen in the phrase *t3w nj ḥnh* 'breath (i.e. air) of life' and in countless examples of *ḥnh* being presented to the king's nose. Although it would be possible to read hidden meanings into this,⁸⁹ to assume that *ḥnh* here meant anything more loaded than 'vital force' would be to go beyond the evidence. Early personal names like *ḥnh-k3j*,⁹⁰ or perhaps the form *nj-ḥnh-GOD*, where the god named is a creator god (by no means always the case) would fit allusions to a sexual meaning better, but in the case of a slightly later name like *ḥnh-m-ḥj-hrw* 'life (comes) from/is with Horus' it would be bold to press the analogy. Better support for a sexual reference may be seen in the fact that the process of creation is portrayed in Egyptian myths as a sexual one; but in the texts that spell this out there is no obvious link between the process and the word *ḥnh*.⁹¹ Again, the best evidence that can be produced is indirect: the relationship between Geb, Nut and Shu

⁸⁵ E.g. CG 20068. 20277. 20079. 20754. A further alternand in this context is the sun-disk with rays, e.g. CG 22139; this may be of relevance to associations between  and the sun-disk. Note also that the interior of , the normal element at this point, may be coloured red, e.g. Durham N 1943, 1953 (not recorded in S. Birch, Catalogue ... Alnwick Castle, London 1880; CG 20188. 20383. 20556. 20593, all visible on plates and noted in text; W. K. Simpson, The terrace of the great god at Abydos, New Haven - Philadelphia 1974, nos. 26,2. 49,2 (?). 50.1 (= CG 20556). 52,1. 63,1-2. 64,1. 65,4. Again the allusion is probably to the sun-disk; Simpson's nos. 55,2 and 74,1 seem to show the sun in different phases, by means of  and . J. Bergman, 'Quelques réflexions sur *nfr* - *nfr.t* - *nfrw*', XXIXe Congrès international des orientalistes, Résumés des Communications, Sections 1-5, Paris 1973, 9-10, has discussed some of these motifs and some sexual associations of *nfr(w)*. The published abstract gives little of the content of the study.

⁸⁶ Wb II, 261, 8. 260,7.

⁸⁷ A. Wilkinson, Ancient Egyptian jewellery, London 1971, 130-31, fig. 59-60.

⁸⁸ Wb I, 196, 9.

⁸⁹ Cf. e.g. Westendorf, in: ZÄS 92, 1966, 152; 94, 1967, 148-9.

⁹⁰ Helck, in: ZÄS 79, 1954, 29; see also above, n. 50.

With *nfrw* one might consider along these lines that names like *nfr-nfrw-jtn/n^c* meant more than the superficial 'beautiful in respect of beauty is Yati' etc..

⁹¹ E.g. PT 1652-3.

in the myth in which Geb and Nut are parted might seem in some way to link sexual potency and air, where Shu (air)⁹² parts the copulating Geb and Nut. It may, then, be significant that in such contexts Geb is sometimes shown in ithyphallic form,⁹³ and that he is also shown wearing a penis sheath.⁹⁴ The potency of Geb is, of course, what originates the rule of human-style gods on earth - Osiris and Isis being the 'children of Nut'. The detail of any such association, and the role in it of Shu, are not yet entirely clear (but cf. n. 92).

In conclusion, some formal aspects of Cnh-sign symbolism, relatively unrelated to the foregoing discussion, may briefly be surveyed.

An over-rigid interpretation of the sign may lead to the neglect of some symbolic references. Thus, Schäfer's view⁹⁵ that the elongated loop of the sign forbids a direct relationship with mirrors or sun-disks, as both of these show a true or flattened circle, is contradicted by several pieces of evidence. It is most improbable that the sun has anything to do with the origin of the sign, but it is certainly drawn later into its range of association.

In the loop of an Cnh-sign that served as a mirror-case the name of TutCankhamun is written above a lotus flower.⁹⁶ This is an allusive form of the scene where the young sun-god appears on a lotus, so that the loop is serving as the framework for a solar scene. In the companion piece the disk on the head of a hh-figure is given the loop shape of an Cnh-sign - or perhaps of a lotus leaf (see below). There can be no doubt that this loop is equivalent to a sun disk.



⁹² Cf. RÄRG, 685. The equation is Shu = air = life, cf. Zandee, Sargtexte Spruch 80, in: ZÄS 101, 1974, 65; Assmann, Liturgische Lieder, 216; Winter, Untersuchungen (above, n. 71), 85-6. On air/wind as a creative force, and on its association with Cnh cf. Morenz, Ägyptische und altorphanische Kosmogonie, in: Fs Schubart, 76. 83-93; esp. 88. 92-3.





⁹³ Most strikingly in pBM 10008, which shows Geb falling away from Nut; cf. also Lanzzone, Dizionario, pl. 166, l. 167, fig. on p. 418.






⁹⁴ Wildung, in: MW 1, 1972, 155, n. 53; the Turin coffin cited is no. 2236, reproduced in J. Omlin, Der Papyrus 55001 und seine satirisch-erotischen Zeichnungen und Inschriften, Cat. Mus. Eg. Torino 3, 1973, pl. 29. This is not the form of the penis sheath that relates to the Cnh-sign.

⁹⁵ In: ZÄS 68, 1932, 1-7

⁹⁶ H. Carter, The tomb of Tut.ankh.Amen III, London etc. 1933, pl. 21B; Carter obj. nos. 271 c-d.

Apart from un-disk-shape disks there are also disk-shape loops. At el-Amarna the sun-disk sign in the script normally has a pendant ; there are some cases where the sign is indicated by , so that the disk serves as the loop.⁹⁷ This has the additional significance in context of producing a monogram reading *jtn c_nḥ*; as a determinative for (n)ḥḥ such a meaning is particularly appropriate.

A comparable play on hieroglyphic signs is found in London, UC 408, a late eighteenth dynasty tomb relief.⁹⁸ Here two altars with piles of bread, probably derived formally from the type with a steep conical pile of loaves,⁹⁹ are modelled into a rebus reading *dj c_nḥ* (the bottom of the group is lost). The triangle of  encloses the whole, and the horizontal line of  is equivalent to the altar-top. The loop of  is a flat, circular loaf, from which a further series is layered vertically. The sense of the whole may be a double pun: the *c_nḥw* 'provisions' on the altar 'give life'.¹⁰⁰ Again, the loop of the  is circular.

The relationship of *c_nḥ*-signs, disks and lotuses just mentioned leads into a much more perilous area of symbolism. The latest example of the form  in Egypt, mentioned above n. 18, is on a catafalque where one would normally expect either  or  alternating with . From relatively early an alternative in such a scheme is a papyrus swathe.¹⁰¹ As geometric shapes papyrus umbel and lotus flower or leaf are easily interchangeable, and the material presented here may serve to make plausible a conscious exploitation of the similarity, or conceivably an unintentional confusion between the two. Simply on the basis of *X-dd* in an alternating scheme being probably *c_nḥ-dd* one might posit that the papyrus swathe was a remote variant of *c_nḥ*. The variant with  produces a closer resemblance between sign and swathe than normal, and might suggest an early origin for the device. Further support might

⁹⁷ E.g. CoA II, pl. 49, no. IV D 16.

⁹⁸ Uphill, A New Kingdom relief from Memphis, in: JEA 48, 1962, 162-3.



⁹⁹ E.g. Schäfer, Kunst/Principles, 195/189, fig. 188.

¹⁰⁰ The presence of the object on a private monument is surprising, as *dj c_nḥ*, whether active or passive in meaning, is mostly restricted to kings, and gods as givers to kings.

¹⁰¹ E.g. Wresz., Atlas I, 405; Hermann, Die Katze im Fenster über der Tür, in: ZÄS 73, 1937, 73, fig. 3; pl. 8a. For swathes by themselves cf. A. M. Donadoni Roveri, I sarcofagi egizi dalle origini alla fine dell'antico regno, Roma 1969, pl. 23, 1-2. 24-5. 27. 30. 39.

be found in cases where a $h\bar{h}$ -figure replaces the $^c n\bar{h}$ element,¹⁰² since $h\bar{h} = \text{šw} = ^c n\bar{h}$, as an association of ideas if not as a literal equivalent.

The links between $^c n\bar{h}$ and the lotus may suggest an analogy with the fans held by personified $^c n\bar{h}$ (and $w\bar{s}s$) in a number of contexts.¹⁰³ The fans are in the form either of a lotus leaf or of a lotus flower, and appear to be to some extent a concrete realisation of the protective formula behind figures of the king: $z\bar{3} \text{ } ^c n\bar{h} \text{ } n\bar{b} \text{ } h\bar{3}j\bar{f} \text{ } \underline{d}t$ etc. so that the lotus would express visually the idea $^c n\bar{h}$. This is shown most graphically in a carnelian plaque of Amenhotpe III, where the $^c n\bar{h}$ -figure forms part of the phrase $\underline{d}dt \text{ } ^c n\bar{h} \text{ } h\bar{3}j\bar{s}$ (= Tiye).¹⁰⁴ Personified $^c n\bar{h}$ and $w\bar{s}s$ of course occur in a variety of roles, and the interpretation just given should not necessarily be generalised among them. It would be tempting to assume that a similar association of lotus and $^c n\bar{h}$ already linked the two early dynastic vessels published by Fischer.¹⁰⁵ His rejection of the idea is based partly on the lack of any symbolic link; but his technical objections will still stand.

From there it is not a large step to suggesting that lotus motifs might elsewhere sometimes symbolise $^c n\bar{h}$. In this way the floral composition of many $^c n\bar{h}$ -patterns like wreaths of flowers¹⁰⁶ or decorated spoons¹⁰⁷ might gain added significance. Just as  is a permissible symbol where the $^c n\bar{h}$ -sign, largely restricted to the divine sphere, is not, these patterns might have the same more or less explicit reference where the sign itself could not be employed. Whether the starting-point for the associations is a formal resemblance or some similarity in symbolic content is unknown. But it might be relevant to cite the familiar secular usage of sniffing a lotus flower, which could be remotely compared with the offering of  to the king's nose. At the same time the symbolism of birth and youth attaching to the lotus in a mythological

¹⁰² E.g. Calverley, Abydos I, pl. 29.




¹⁰³ E.g. Firth - Quibell, Step Pyramid II, pl. 15-17. 40-41.


¹⁰⁴ MMA 26.7.1339, in e.g. C. Aldred, *New Kingdom art in ancient Egypt*, London² 1961, pl. 100; best illustrated in: JEA 3, 1916, pl. 11 facing p. 73. For a possible parallel cf. Thausing - Goedicke, *Nofret-ari*, fig. 142.

¹⁰⁵ In: MMJ 5, 1972, 5-17.

¹⁰⁶ E.g. Calverley, Abydos II, pl. 10-11; Fischer, in: ZÄS 100, 1973, 25, fig. 6a-b. In both the latter the floral patterns may be specifically meaningful.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Wallert, *Verzierte Löffel*, pl. 17. 21-3. 26-7; J. Vandier d'Abbadie, *Catalogue des objets de toilette égyptiens*, Musée du Louvre, Paris 1972, nos. 22. 23. 27. 31. 33-4. 36. 39-40. 42. 57 (including examples with a cartouche as the bowl motif).

context, although not attested in the visual record before the New Kingdom,¹⁰⁸ might be a further distant motif in the background of a relationship between  and lotus. At a very late period support may be found at Meroe, where a decorative motif resembling  has in one case a lotus in its loop, and in another . ¹⁰⁹

It may be possible to bring the attestation of the form  a little later in time (apart from the Meroitic allusion just mentioned) if decorative or amuletic elements on New Kingdom religious figures are considered;¹¹⁰ these certainly resemble the form strongly, but the connection is vague. Westendorfs's assumption that paired strips forming part of royal and divine clothing (largely female) in the New Kingdom are covert *ḥnḥ*-signs¹¹¹ concerns a comparable extra element on garments, but the allusion is much vaguer still; and it is not clear whether the strips forming parts of complex kilts etc. or separately tied belts are meant. An additional problem is that objects of both Erler's and Westendorf's types tend to be red,¹¹² whereas the *ḥnḥ*-sign is blue.


Any search for further decorative or symbolic associations of the sign need not, therefore, be limited by details of its shape, and may even rely exclusively on contextual rather than formal criteria. But the further any such search is pushed, the more hypothetical the links may be.

¹⁰⁸ S. Morenz - J. Schubert, *Der Gott auf der Blume*, Ascona 1954, 68-9; cf. E.-Chr. Strauß, *Die Nunschale*, MÄS 30, München 1974.

¹⁰⁹ Dunham, RCK IV, 138, fig. 90, no. 21-3-58. 168, fig. 109 top L (21-3-160) = pl. 51C.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Erler, *Symbol des Lebens* (above, n. 7), fig. 8-9.

¹¹¹ In: ZÄS 92, 1966, 152.

¹¹² An analogy with  would for this reason seem more appropriate. For examples of strips on female clothing cf. Calverley, *Abydos III*, pl. 1. 6. 33. 40. On kings extra strips on complex kilts mostly alternate between red and blue, cf. *ibid.*, pl. 7. 33. 40 (white and red); IV, pl. 1. 13. 17. 32. 35.



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Domestic space and gender roles in ancient Egyptian village households: a view from Amarna workmen's village and Deir el-Medina

Aikaterini Koltsida

AIM OF THE STUDY

The importance of the household in ancient Egypt is clearly reflected in the language, where among the words for marriage were *q r pr*, literally translated 'to enter a house', or *grg pr*, meaning 'to establish a house(hold)' (Pestman 1961, 9–10). The commonest title for a married woman is *nbt pr*, 'lady of the house' (Toivari 2000, 17–20). However, it is noticeable that there were no specific words for each room or area of the house, as was later the case in Hellenistic Egypt (Husson 1983). The interpretation of the relationship between gender and space within ancient Egyptian village households will be the focus of this paper. The term 'village houses' refers to small domestic units of the middle and lower classes, located in small self-contained villages. The best-preserved sites comprising such architecture are two New Kingdom workmen's villages at Tell el-Amarna and Deir el-Medina.

THE WORKMEN'S VILLAGES AT AMARNA AND DEIR EL-MEDINA

The workmen's village in the area of Amarna (in Middle Egypt) lay in a small valley between the cliffs east of Akhetaten, the new state capital established by the pharaoh Akhenaten (FIG. 13.1). The village was built to house the workmen of the Royal Tombs. It was walled and almost square, with two gateways at the south, and consisted of six rows of houses, divided by five streets. The site was initially excavated by Peet and Woolley in 1921–2, when 36 houses were excavated (Peet 1921, 175–8; Woolley 1922, 48–59; Peet and Woolley 1923, 51–91). The excavation was careful, considering the archaeological methods of the period, and the publication rather detailed, with a reasonable interpretation of the function of each room. Recently, Barry Kemp excavated four more houses in the village (Kemp 1978, 24–6; 1979, 47–53; 1980, 5–12; 1981, 5–16; Kemp *et al.* 1986, 1–33; 1987, 1–46, 132–59). The thorough publication, with detailed description and analysis, has provided substantial material for the study of the domestic architecture in the village.

The village of Deir el-Medina lay at the West Bank of Thebes between the Valleys of the Kings and the Queens, and was also built to house the workmen of the Royal Tombs (FIG. 13.2). It was excavated by Bruyère during the second decade of the twentieth century. In the publication the interpretation seems to have influenced the presentation of data. As a result of a largely unsupervised excavation, only the impressive or precious finds are recorded with the distinction of the room in which they were discovered (Bruyère 1928; 1933; 1934; 1939). Recently some parts of the village were re-excavated by Bonnet and Valbelle to reveal the stratigraphy (Bonnet and Valbelle 1975; 1976). The village was occupied from the early Eighteenth until the late Twentieth Dynasty, undergoing several extensions. It is roughly rectangular in plan and surrounded by an enclosure wall. The final layout contained 68 houses. As at Amarna, the plan gives the impression of terraced housing built in rows attached to each other. There was one main gateway at the north, leading to the main street.

The general layout of the Amarna village houses is highly standardised: they were rectangular and their floor area was consistently about 5 × 10 m. Each house was divided into three unequal parts: a rectangular front room, an almost square middle one, and a rectangular rear part, which was divided into two smaller areas. Most of the excavated houses possessed a staircase, in either the front or the rear part. The ground-plan and size of the houses in Deir el-Medina closely resemble those of the Amarna Village; they are not quite as standardised as those at Amarna, but this is a result of individual alterations over a much longer period of occupation. Almost all the houses share the same basic features, being roughly rectangular and consisting of four successive rooms, rather than three as was the case at Amarna.

ROOM FUNCTION IN THE VILLAGE HOUSES

The front room of the houses in both villages was rectangular or roughly rectangular. Inside the room the staircase was sometimes constructed, which generally

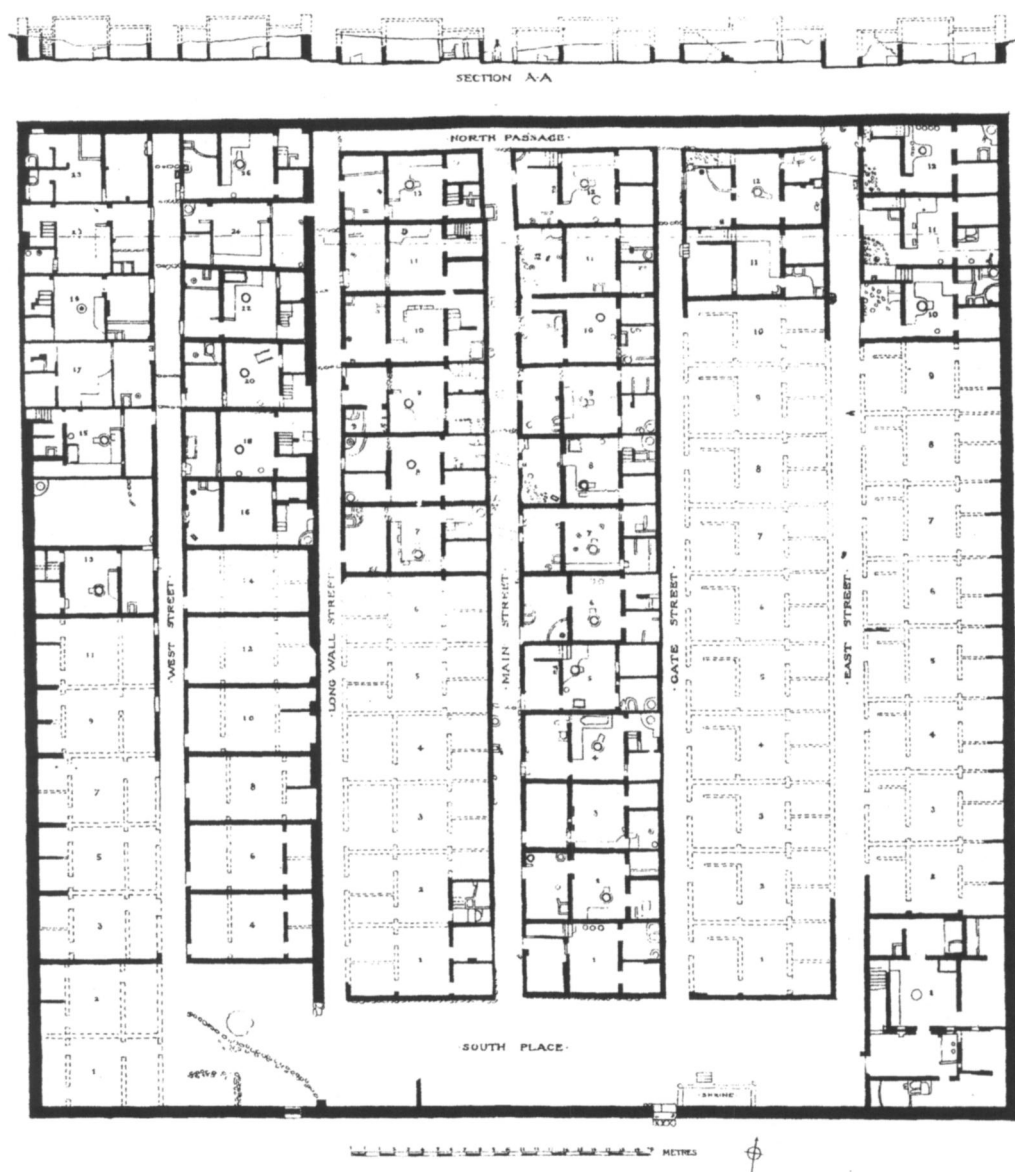


Fig. 13.1. *Amarna Workmen's Village, plan (after Peet and Woolley 1923, pl. XVI; reproduced with permission of the Egypt Exploration Society).*

had a cupboard underneath. A short coping wall divided the room into two smaller parts in some Amarna village houses. There are strong elements to suggest that this room was used for keeping animals in many cases (Peet and Woolley 1923, 60–1; Koltsida 2001, 58–64). When the room was subdivided, one part was usually meant for keeping animals, and that was also the case for the area under the staircase (Peet and Woolley 1923, 60, 72). Texts from Deir el-Medina inform us that the villagers possessed animals such as donkeys, cattle and pigs (Janssen 1975, 164–78; McDowell 1992, 197–9), which were kept for their products, their meat and their services (Houlihan 1996, 11–31; Janssen and Janssen 1989, 27–36). Furthermore, there is clear evidence for the keeping of pigs in Amarna workmen's village, either in animal pens outside the village or within the houses (Kemp *et al.* 1987, 40). A number of other domestic

activities also took place in the front room, such as grinding and sometimes cooking or bread-making (Koltsida 2001, 58–64, 119–21). Horizontal looms were sometimes put in the front rooms, indicating that weaving also happened there (Koltsida 2001, 73).

The front room has been generally considered as a roofed area (Peet and Woolley 1923, 55–61; Bruyère 1939, 54), but in the recent excavation of the house at Gate Street 8 in the Amarna workmen's village (Kemp *et al.* 1986, 1–27) no roof fragments came to light from the front room, and the excavator suggested that this part of the house was an open court. In addition, the vast majority of ancient Egyptian house models represent houses with a walled front court (Koltsida 2001, 30–40), while a two-dimensional representation of a similar tripartite house in a block from Karnak also depicts the front room as a court (FIG. 13.3; Hammad

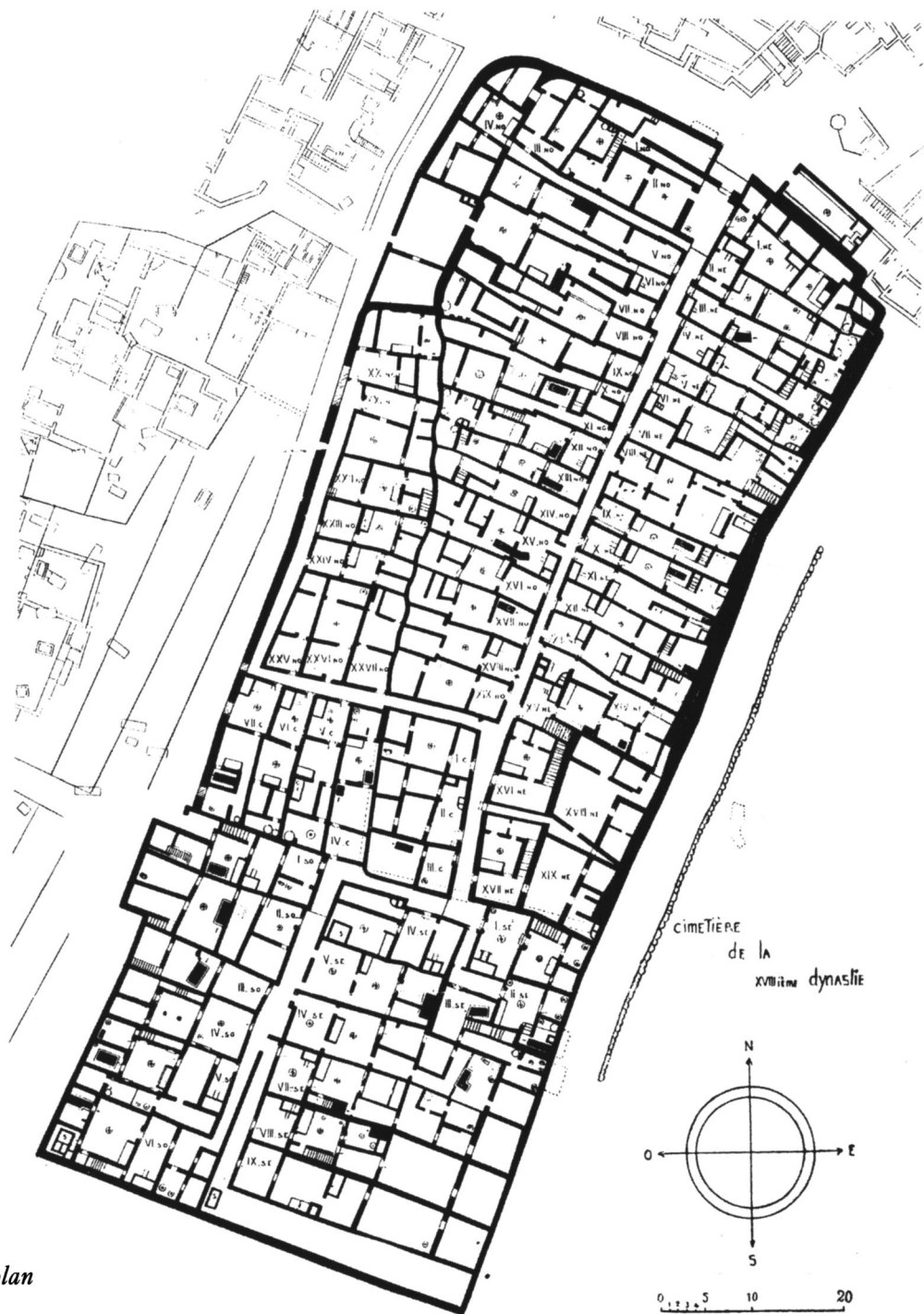


Fig. 13.2. Deir el-Medina, plan (after Bruyère 1939, pl. 63; reproduced with permission of the Institut Française d'Archéologie Orientale).

and Werkmeister 1955, 104–8). The activities that took place in this room, i.e. animal-keeping, grinding, baking and weaving, do not require a roofed area. In modern Egyptian rural houses such activities are concentrated in an unroofed area, and in particular the front court (Fakhouri 1987, 18). Therefore, it is feasible that the front room in the houses of both villages was either totally unroofed or occasionally covered, possibly with a semi-permanent roof.

One of the constituents of the front room of the Deir el-Medina houses that has raised a number of arguments for its use is the so-called 'elevated bed' (*lit clos*: Bruyère 1939, 62). This is a rectangular, elevated brick platform with three to five steps leading up to it, incorporated in one of the corners of the room and enclosed by thin walls (Bruyère 1939, 56–7). These platforms were either whitewashed or plastered and painted, and their decoration usually depicts the god Bes in a celebratory mood



Fig. 13.3. House representation from a block in Karnak (after Hammad and Werkmeister 1955, fig. 1; reproduced with permission of Akademie Verlag GmbH).

or other motifs and scenes, some of which are connected with female activities (Koltsida 2001, 67–9).

These structures have traditionally been interpreted as birth beds (Bruyère 1939, 59; Brunner-Traut 1955, 23; Pinch 1983, 405–14), while most recently it has been claimed that they ‘focused broadly on female life in all its aspects, including the procreative, the maternal and even the erotic’ (Friedman 1994, 110). Besides the fact that it seems most unlikely that such activities would have taken place in the most public part of the house, which was also dedicated to dusty activities such as grinding or animal-keeping, the similarities of these structures to the domestic altars, usually placed in the central room of the large Amarna villas (Koltsida 2001, 166–7), are considerable, and it seems conceivable that they served as domestic shrines, placed in the front instead of the middle room of the house, owing to the lack of space in the latter. Therefore, instead of considering these structures as the place for childbirth, it is likely that they were areas where, among other possible rituals, fertility and successful childbirth were celebrated (Kemp 1979, 53).

The middle room was square or almost square. It possessed a sitting place in the form of a low dais against one or two of its walls, and a hearth, usually at the centre of the room or in close proximity to the dais. A central column supported the roof in most Deir el-Medina middle rooms, while in Amarna columns were less usual. The walls were usually whitewashed or plastered and painted, and a painted dado (up to about 1 m) was common. Niches and false doors were also usual, bearing traces of the placement of lamps or stelae (Demarée 1984) and/or ancestral busts on them (Friedman 1985, 82; Koltsida 2001, 134–6). Water jars were commonly

placed into holes in the floor, while tables, tools, spinning and weaving equipment, and dining and drinking utensils are usual among the room assemblages.

This room undoubtedly served as the main living room of the house, where people sat and relaxed, on chairs and stools placed on the dais or the floor, or directly squatting on a mat put on the dais (Koltsida 2001, 139–43). In those cases they would possibly discuss family matters, play board games, entertain themselves with domestic pets, eat and drink, either with friends, or with other family members, as texts inform us (Koltsida 2001, 236–8). It was also the area where prayers would be conducted to the divine, and rituals would be performed (connected with the stelae and/or ancestral busts). In some small houses the room was also used for spinning, weaving, stitching or embroidering, and possibly even for sleeping, when the house did not provide much space for all household members to sleep in a separate bedroom (Koltsida 2001, 243–5). The roof, although traditionally considered as being higher than that of the other rooms, is most likely to have been at the same level as the other rooms (Koltsida 2001, 328–56).

Of the two rear rooms one was evidently a kitchen in most cases (except where cooking took place in the front room: Koltsida 2001, 52–65). This is indicated archaeologically by the appearance of a fireplace and/or an oven within the room, while mortars, water jars, vases, plates, baking dishes, pounders and pounding pebbles, spoons, drills, razors and mallets were common among the deposits (Koltsida 2001, 306–10). Silos for grain storage were also usual. The staircase, when not in the front room, was generally placed in the cooking area, with the cupboard under the stairs providing more storage space.

The other rear room of the house was always at the side of the kitchen in the Amarna houses, while in Deir el-Medina it was situated between the kitchen and the living room. The room was evidently used for sleeping, as indicated archaeologically by the low daises that have survived against one of the walls, and also by bed supports, which have been preserved in at least two cases (Koltsida 2001, 260–1). These daises were used either directly as beds, with a mat placed on them, like the one described as a 'sleeping mat' in an ostrakon (Černý and Gardiner 1957, LVI:1:4; McDowell 1999, 45), or as platforms to support beds, as two-dimensional representations indicate: in the palace bedroom depiction from the tomb of Ahmes in Amarna the bed is clearly placed on a higher level than the rest of the furniture of the room (Davies 1905, pl. XXXIV).

Beds were undoubtedly part of the furniture of the workmen's houses, as indicated by textual references (Kitchen 1983, 164–5, 664), and by the discovery of beds in the workmen's tombs, such as the well-known examples from the tomb of Kha (Leospo 1988, 149–50). The bedrooms were also used for storage, as implied by the appearance of cupboards, shelves, bins and storage or water jars (Koltsida 2001, 251–93). Valuable items were usually kept there, for the bedroom is the most private part of the house that a guest or a stranger would or could not enter. The fact that the bedrooms were used for storage is also evident from two-dimensional representations: in the scene depicting the bed from the mastaba of Mereruka several chests and jars are illustrated underneath the bed (Duell 1938, pl. 95).

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE HOUSEHOLD

Having examined the characteristics of the rooms in the village houses, we will now turn to a brief examination of the role of women in those villages. The wife was the mistress of the house (Toivari 2000, 17–46) and her primary duty was to look after her house. The social importance of the status of a wife, achieved through marriage, was further increased with motherhood, and therefore giving birth was a significant point in every woman's life and raising the children was mainly a female task (Toivari 2000, 223). Besides taking care of the house and children, women were also responsible for food preparation (Verhoenen 1984; Roehrig 1996, 15; Toivari 2000, 224). These obligations were not easy and required a considerable amount of time. Texts inform us of the provision of female slaves to do the grinding in Deir el-Medina for some days in each household (Černý 1973, 175–81). Textual references do not provide precise information about the degree that each household member had to assist in domestic activities, but it seems that young daughters were gradually involved, while elderly women would have perceptibly fewer obligations (Toivari 2000, 224), as is the case in modern Egypt (Fakhouri 1987, 63; Hoodfar 1997, 167).

Keeping and caring for the domestic cattle was also a female responsibility. Characteristically, Butetamun, a villager in Deir el-Medina, addressed his deceased wife, Ikhaty, in a letter to her, as 'she who fetched her cattle' (Černý and Gardiner 1957, pl. LXXX; Frandsen 1992, 33). Spinning and weaving were also female activities and women could increase their personal capital by the exchange of self-made textiles or clothes for desired goods (Toivari 2000, 233). However, the extent to which they could expand their economic assets by textile production, without having to share the profits with their husbands, remains unclear (Eyre 1998, 173–91). Nevertheless, women were generally involved not only in the production of goods but also in trading them, as indicated by iconographic (Davies and Faulkner 1947) and textual evidence (Gardiner 1935, 140–6; Eyre 1998, 173–91).

SPACE AND GENDER IN THE VILLAGE HOUSES

A very important aspect of domestic life is the position of women in the household and their access, or otherwise, to specific areas of the house. Historically, the undertaking of household work has been ideologically designated as a female occupation; a woman's labour at home represents not strictly 'work' but a way of being (Rollins-Ahlander and Slaugh-Bahr 1995, 54–68). Traditionally archaeology has interpreted areas with a modern western gender bias; male persons were *a priori* assumed to have been active producers and the dominant figures in the society and the family, whereas women were meant to be passive users of the fruits of male labour, therefore having a subordinate role. Thus, a grinding pounder discovered in a female tomb was taken to mean that it was buried with the person who used it. The same object, discovered in a male tomb, would be interpreted as being buried with the person who manufactured it, or for whom it was used (Conkey and Spector 1998). However, since the 1980s the study of gender has been considered as a significant issue in understanding human behaviour and reconstructing the past (Sørensen 1988; Gilchrist 1991; 1999). Recent studies have also addressed the issue of the relationship between gender relations and use of space (Spector 1983; 1993; Engelstad 1991; Tringham 1991; Meskell 1998a). Following the aforementioned micro-spatial analysis of each room of the village houses, the final part of this paper will try to link the activities performed in each area with gender relations.

The front room of the village houses was a multifunctional area and most possibly an unroofed court (see above). The activities that took place in this room were typical female activities in ancient Egypt (grinding, animal-keeping, spinning and weaving), and it would be legitimate to suggest that it was a primarily female-oriented area. Indeed, Meskell (1998a, 215) envisages the room as such, but her consideration is principally based on the speculation that the elevated

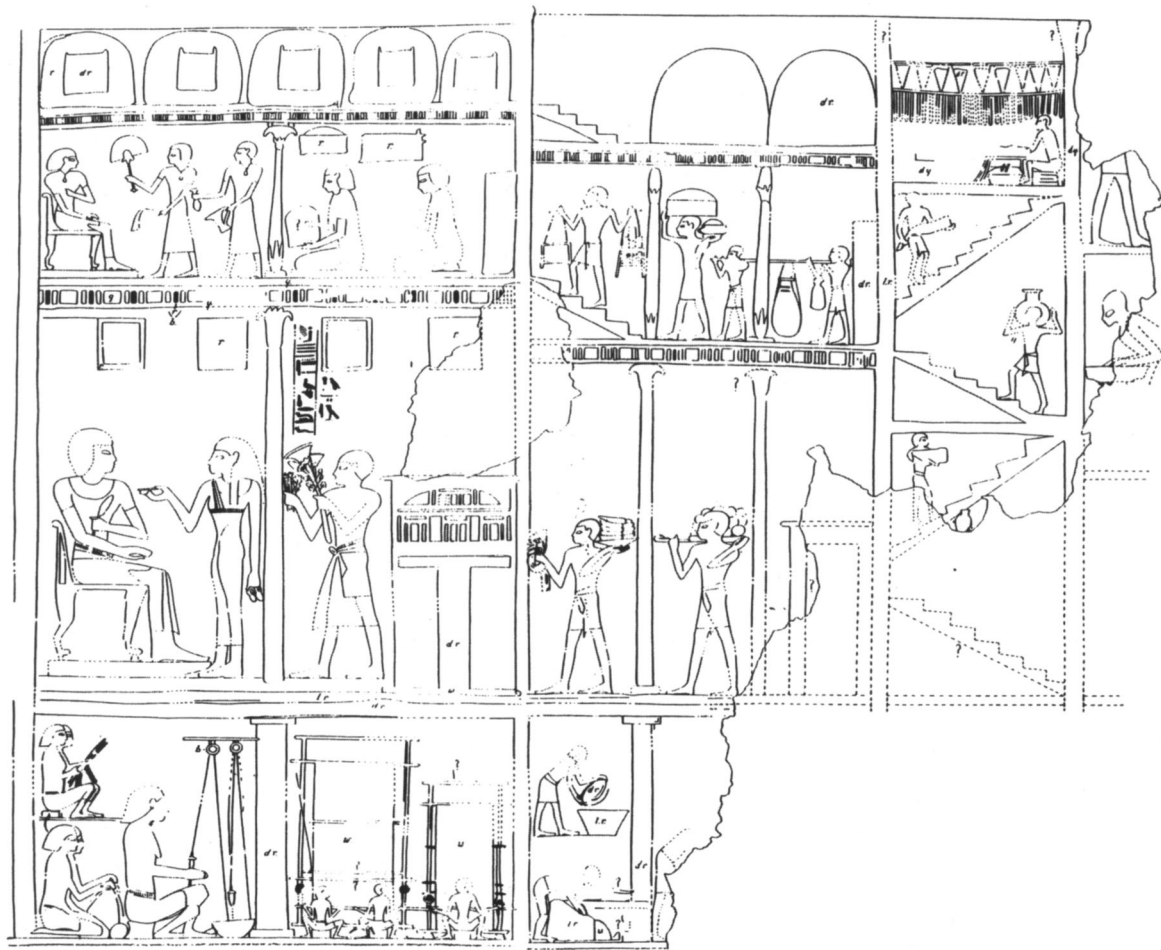


Fig. 13.4. The house of Thut-nefer. Theban Tomb 104 (after Davies 1929, fig. 1; reproduced with permission of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

bed was related to female sexuality. Nevertheless, this platform was presumably a house altar and, as such, it could be equally applied to men and women. It seems more possible that the room was female territory during the day hours (when men were away working and women performed the daily domestic tasks), while for the rest of the day the area was evenly used by men and women.

Considering the front part of the house a court, then the middle room would be the only proper area for sitting and eating. According to Meskell's suggestion the living room in Deir el-Medina was primarily for the use of the master of the house and his male friends (Meskell 1998a, 229). The dais, the column, the wall decoration, the niches and false doors, are considered male status symbols, while the primarily male use of the room is further implied by the appearance of the ritual areas within the room (Meskell 1998a, 230–2; 2000, 433). There is no reason to suspect that the dais, a common element in most houses, and one that also appears in other rooms, was genuinely related to men. In early modern Egypt *dimans* (which are the modern equivalent of the ancient dais: Lane 1895, 22–8) were

equally placed in the male and female areas (Scarce 1996, 22–3, 31–2). Besides, the archaeological evidence for the existence of looms in the room clearly connects it with women. We may suggest that such activities might have happened while men were absent, but there is clear evidence in textual references and two-dimensional representations for the opposite. In the aforementioned Karnak relief (FIG. 13.3), a man and a woman are depicted in the middle room of the house, which is also the case in the representation of the house of Thut-nefer (FIG. 13.4; Davies 1929, 233–55; Doyen 1998, 345–55). In the 'Tale of the Two Brothers', Bata (the younger brother) returns home and finds his brother Anubis sitting with his wife, in a room that was most possibly the living room of the house (Gardiner 1932, 9–10; Lichtheim 1976, 203–4). Among the ancient Egyptian terms for marriage is *hms* (*irm* or *m di*), which is literally translated as 'to sit/live with' (Pestman 1961, 9–10), while in some cases the wife is addressed as the 'eating companion' of her husband (Černý and Posener 1978, 19, pl. 22; Sweeney 1998, 103). Furthermore, anthropological comparisons show that even in early modern Islamic Egypt, distinct specification of male

and female areas appeared only in very large houses of wealthy families. Even in those houses women use 'male' areas when men are not at home, and retire to the most private 'female' areas when the male members of the family have guests (Petherbridge 1978, 198; Koltsida 2002, 185–8). In contrast, in smaller or poorer houses, men and women were crammed together in all available areas (Shaarawi 1986, 8). As for the rituals being primarily a male concern, although there is no clear evidence as to what took place during those rituals, the fact that men and women are among the dedicators and the dedicatees of the stelae shows that there is no particular reason to exclude women from participation in domestic rituals.

In most cultures the kitchen is a primarily female territory (Spector 1983; Dubisch 1986; Hoodfar 1997, 166–71). In Deir el-Medina women were mainly involved in grinding and food preparation (see above). It has been suggested that the rear rooms of the Deir el-Medina houses and the kitchen were areas for the lower-status females of the household, such as the slaves/servants (Meskell 1998a, 233). It is likely that most slaves/servants were owned/employed to work in the fields (McDowell 1992, 195–206), and that all household females participated in food preparation. However, this does not exclude men from the use of the room, as they were involved in beer-making, and are recorded as taking time out of work for that purpose (Janssen 1980, 146–7). It is characteristic that in the modern Egyptian village of Balat men can sometimes accompany women and children in the kitchen and eat there (Hivernel 1996, 22–3). Furthermore, in houses where the staircase was placed in the kitchen area, men would certainly use the room, at least as a passage to the roof or the upper floor. Therefore, we cannot specify the kitchen as an exclusively female area.

The specification of the gender use of the bedroom is not particularly clear from the archaeological record. Men and women are sometimes illustrated together on beds, either just sitting (as in the mastaba of Mereruka at Saqqara: Duell 1938, pl. 95), or having sexual intercourse (Manniche 1997, fig. 21). In a three-dimensional model from the Late Period a couple is represented having sexual intercourse: the female is kneeling on what seems to be a low bench and the man is behind her (Schulze 1987, 69). Arguably, this bench is analogous with the bedroom daises. In 'The Tale of the Doomed Prince' the prince 'lay down on his bed' while 'his wife was sitting beside him' (Gardiner 1932, 7; Lichtheim 1976, 202). Anthropological comparisons with modern Egypt show that in poor families living in small houses, brothers and sisters may sleep in the same bedroom (Wikan 1980, 4). Therefore we can envisage the bedroom as a room used

by men, women, or both, according to the needs and preference of the family.

Meskell (1998a, 236) has interpreted the room identified here as a bedroom, as a room related to sexually mature women during menstruation. This interpretation is based essentially on cross-cultural comparison. Seclusion of women during menstruation is a custom well attested in other cultures (Galloway 1998), where women used menstruation huts constructed outside the village proper, while special taboos for menstruating women are common to many cultures (Buckley and Gottlieb 1988; Knight 1991). There is only one relevant text from ancient Egypt, which comes from Deir el-Medina: 'Year 9, fourth month of the season of Inundation, day 13: The day when these eight women came out [to the] place of women when they were *hsmn* (menstruating)' (Wilfong 1999, 420).

The sense given to the term *hsmn* is not absolutely certain. According to the most recent interpretation, women went to a particular location (the 'place of women') either because of an 'ordinary' period, or because of some special circumstances related to menstruation, such as dysmenorrhoea (Wilfong 1999, 424), but it is also possible that it refers to young girls having their first menstruation (Toivari 2000, 150). Furthermore, it has been suggested that *hsmn* had a polyvalent meaning, naming not only menstruation but also purification (Janssen 1980, 141–3). In any case, the text makes it clear that the women were going outside the village proper. Therefore, a suggestion that the rear room of the house was constructed for such a purpose is less likely, bearing in mind that women who live together tend to have a synchronised cycle (McClintock 1971, 244–5), and therefore such a room would be used for only five to seven days a month, while the evidence for benches in such rooms in both villages clearly connects the room with sleeping and sitting. The whole argument is implausible anyway, given the very limited space available in the house.

To conclude, women indeed occupied the houses most of the time, and this would be true throughout ancient Egyptian society and not just in the workmen's villages. This does not necessarily mean that their decoration was generally or partially devoted to womanhood, childbirth or aspects of female life. Even if this was the case, this was a male decision, as men seem to have decorated the houses. Of course, women could possibly influence their husbands' decisions, but to what extent cannot be recovered. Archaeological, iconographic and textual evidence clearly suggests that the rooms in ancient Egyptian village houses had multiple uses and that there were not any clearly distinguished male and female areas within those houses, the rooms of which were equally used by men and by women.



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NATIONALIST PROPAGANDA IN PTOLEMAIC EGYPT*

Egyptian reactions to the Macedonian conquest have been a subject of discussion for many years, and Egyptian nationalist propaganda has not failed to feature prominently in the debate. It might well be questioned, therefore, whether anything significantly new is likely to emerge from yet another treatment. The justification for the present study is quite simply the novelty of its approach which consists in extending the analysis of Egyptian nationalist propaganda beyond an Egyptian, Hellenistic or even a Graeco-Roman context to the point where it is assessed as an example of a specific socio-political phenomenon identifiable at some time in most societies and at most stages of human history, i. e. as an example of the phenomenon of propaganda itself.

We intend to deal with the subject in two stages. First, an attempt will be made to define the nature of propaganda on the basis of modern studies and instances. We shall then examine four bodies of material which derive directly or indirectly from Egyptian sources of the Hellenistic Age in order to determine how well they fit the proposed model, and, if they do, to define the implications of that agreement.

Propaganda may be defined as a conscious attempt by a social group to impose or encourage an attitude by exploiting communication media¹. Ostensibly it may be directed at the propagandist's society, at some target outside it, or at both simultaneously. Paradoxically, however, the basic psychological motivation seems to be, in most, if not in all cases, the need to buttress the precarious sense of security of the propagandist group.

* This paper began life as a lecture delivered at a University of Wales Classics Colloquium held at Gregynog, Powys, in May, 1979, and I benefited greatly from the discussion which it generated on that occasion. Later versions were read by my colleagues at the University College of Swansea, Professor J. Gwyn Griffiths (Department of Classics and Ancient History) and Dr. Richard Taylor (Department of Political Theory and Government) whose assistance and encouragement in a perilous enterprise are gratefully acknowledged. The views expressed, however, are my own.

Abbreviations are based on *L'Année Philologique* or *The Annual Egyptological Bibliography*. *RÄRG* = H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin, 1952; *Urkunden* = K. Sethe, *et alii*, *Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums*, Leipzig and Berlin, 1903ff.; *Wb.* = A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, 7 vols., Leipzig and Berlin, 1926-63.

¹ For useful modern discussions of the nature and techniques of propaganda and related phenomena see L. W. Doob, *Propaganda: its Psychology and Technique*, New York, 1935; E. Dichter, *The Strategy of Desire*, London and New York, 1960; T. H. Qualter, *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare*, New York, 1962; J. A. C. Brown, *Techniques of Persuasion*, Harmondsworth, 1963; J. Ellul, *Propaganda: the Formation of Men's Attitudes*, New York, 1973. I use the term 'communication media' in the widest sense to include *any* medium by which the propaganda message may be conveyed.

The use of media and the formulation of vehicles of propaganda show certain constants. One important principle is that the propagandist does not normally reveal himself as such. If he does, he runs the risk of activating resistance to his message in the audience. Therefore, familiar media and familiar genres are essential. Another recurrent feature is the predilection for an authoritative or at least prestigious source: an obvious contemporary example is the use of sporting, television or film personalities in advertizing, the form of propaganda to which western society is most often exposed. A further item in the propagandist's apparatus is the technique of confident assertion: he will not argue the case but simply states that such and such a thing *is* the case. Another weapon is repetition. Where the audience is amenable to the message this technique hammers it ever more deeply into the consciousness, whereas in the case of a hostile target repetition serves to break down and penetrate resistance. A further important feature is that the vehicle does not depart too far or for too long from the truth². That is not, of course, the same as saying that the propagandist tells the whole truth; for selectivity is the very essence of his craft, and he uses only that material which is conducive to projecting the required image. On the other hand, we must not assume that propaganda is, *by its nature*, untruthful, but, since serious distortion is commoner than not, there is an inevitable tendency to identify propaganda with downright lies. Another common device is name-substitution on which we can do no better than quote J. A. C. Brown's *Techniques of Persuasion*:

The propagandist frequently tries to influence his audience by substituting favourable or unfavourable terms, with an emotional connotation, for neutral ones unsuitable to his purpose. Hence 'Red' instead of 'Communist' or 'Russian', 'Union Bosses' for presidents of the union, 'Huns' or 'Boches' for Germans, 'Yids' for Jews. On the other hand, 'free enterprise' sounds better than 'capitalism' in these times, and the writer of advertising copy is often an adept at substituting long and impressive-sounding words to conceal the true identity of the relatively simple constituents of patent medicines or cosmetics.³

Closely related is the technique whereby an individual or a group is set up or 'pinpointed' as 'the enemy' to serve as a focal point of communal hatred. The function of this operation is again well illustrated by Brown in his analysis of the classic modern example:

... the Nazi campaigns against the Jews and the 'plutodemocracies' ... by careful selection of targets in line with the already-existing traditions of the group, had the dual effects (*a*) of directing aggression

² See Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 94ff.; Ellul, *op. cit.*, pp. 52ff., 84ff.

³ Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

away from the propagandist and his party, and (b) of strengthening in-group feelings thus improving party morale.⁴

Finally, since the propagandist is in the business of psychological manipulation, he is usually adept at exploiting that most potent of psychological weapons, the symbol.⁵ Symbols are at once substitutes and summations. They may relate simply to a given socio-political context, but the most potent of them are nothing less than a means by which the basic patterns of human mental and emotional activity become tractable to conscious thought and expression. Their ability to evoke with economy so many points of reference, and their capacity to penetrate to the very roots of the human *psyche* make them ideal tools for psychological engineering.

As for the relationship between the propagandist and his *conscious* target, such relations are usually straightforward. Whether the target is hostile or not, the intention will be to induce an attitude or pattern of behaviour to one's own advantage.

The importance of the propagandist's sense of insecurity emerges in several ways. In the first place, it is evident that some propaganda serves mainly to confirm the sense of identity of the propagandist and the social group for which he works. This can be achieved by using the propaganda to reassert the axioms or postulates on which the social group is based, whether these axioms be political, social or religious. Another important element which can be related to the insecurity problem is the wish-fulfilment aspect which occurs in much propaganda.⁶ Here the propagandist provides his audience – and often himself – with an imaginary substitute for some desired entity which he is incapable of providing in reality. A further element related to the insecurity question is the attempt made by much political propaganda to strip the enemy of his capacity to inspire fear. This may be done in several ways: propagandists may insist on their opponent's weaknesses, real or imaginary; they may ridicule them or humiliate them or heap them with contempt; they may even attempt to unman them. Such tricks often have the effect of dehumanizing the enemy, but, whatever their precise character, they are always intended to reduce the enemy to psychologically tractable proportions⁷.

⁴ Op. cit., p. 28.

⁵ Cf. in particular Ellul, op. cit., pp. 31, 111, 163, n. 3. On stereotypes see W. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, London, 1934, p. 79ff.

⁶ On this point Ellul is most perceptive: 'Propaganda dissolves contradictions and restores to man a unitary world in which the demands are in accord with the facts . . . One is always at the point of finishing the war – in Algeria or Vietnam or the Congo, of overtaking the United States, of repelling the Communist threat, of eliminating all frustrations' (op. cit., p. 159); 'Propaganda satisfies man's need for release and certainty, it eases his tensions and compensates for his frustrations, but with purely artificial means' (op. cit., p. 174).

⁷ Cf. Ellul, op. cit., p. 11ff.

Having defined the nature of propaganda we may now proceed to a discussion of Egyptian national propaganda of the Hellenistic Age. However, if we are to place this material in context we must first get a clear picture of the social and political system which gave rise to it⁸.

There were two main social strata in Hellenistic Egypt, Greeks and Macedonians forming one, the native Egyptians the other. The former were the dominant group, and exercised a control over the administration and army which was, to all intents and purposes, total until the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator (211–205), and, despite some Egyptian inroads, they remained predominant until the end of the dynasty. For most of the Ptolemaic Period the Egyptian stratum was made up of several major groups: the priests, who formed the elite, the *Machimoi*, or warrior class, a lower middle class of entrepreneurs and scribes occupying the lower echelons of the civil service, and the peasantry; at the beginning of the period one can also detect the presence of a lay aristocracy and a class of senior civil servants, but these quickly disappear from the record. Relations between these two strata were, on the whole, strained, partly because of linguistic and cultural differences, which few showed any serious interest in resolving, but mainly because the Graeco-Macedonian attitude to the Egyptians was that the Egyptians were there to be exploited for the benefit of their foreign masters. This attitude did not fail to generate amongst the vast majority of the natives a mood of bitterness and desperation which found expression in the proliferation of *asyla*, a rash of strikes, mass flights into the deserts or marshes, and a long series of rebellions beginning at least as early as the reign of Ptolemy IV and continuing

⁸ On the history of relations between Graeco-Macedonians and Egyptians see, *int. al.*, H. I. Bell, 'Hellenic Culture in Egypt', *JEA* 8 (1922), p. 139ff.; P. Jouguet, 'Les Lagides et les indigènes égyptiens', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 2 (1923), p. 419ff.; E. Bevan, *The House of Ptolemy*, Chicago, 1968 (revised reprint of 1927 Ed.), p. 79ff.; J. G. Milne, 'Egyptian Nationalism under Greek and Roman Rule', *JEA* 14 (1928), p. 226ff.; C. Préaux, 'Esquisse d'une histoire des révolutions égyptiennes sous les Lagides', *CdÉ* 11 (1936), p. 522ff.; S. Davis, *Race-Relations in Ancient Egypt*, London, 1951; W. W. Tarn and G. T. Griffith, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 3rd Ed., London, 1952, p. 177ff.; M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, Revised Ed., Oxford, 1953, I, p. 316ff.; II, p. 705ff.; S. K. Eddy, *The King is Dead. Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism 334–31 B. C.*, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1961, p. 257ff.; W. Peremans, 'Égyptiens et étrangers dans l'Égypte ptolémaïque', *Fondation Hardt* 8 (1962), p. 121ff.; J. W. B. Barns, *Egyptians and Greeks* (Inaugural Lecture), Oxford 1966; J. Bingen, 'Présence grecque et milieu rural ptolémaïque' in M. I. Finley (Ed.), *Problèmes de la Terre en Grèce Ancienne*, Paris, 1973, p. 215ff.; W. Huss, 'Eine Revolte der Ägypter in der Zeit des 3. Syrischen Kriegs', *Aegyptus* 58 (1978), p. 151ff.; W. Peremans, 'Les Révolutions égyptiennes sous les Lagides' in H. Maehler and V. M. Strocka (Eds.), *Das ptolemäische Ägypten*, Mainz am Rhein, 1978, p. 39ff.; J. Gwyn Griffiths in J. Ruffle (Ed.), *Glimpses of Ancient Egypt*, Warminster, 1979, p. 174ff. Greek attitudes to race in general are discussed by A. Diller, *Race Mixture among the Greeks before Alexander*, University of Illinois, 1937; H. C. Baldry, *The Unity of Mankind in Greek Thought*, Cambridge, 1965; F. M. Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1970. p. 169ff.

until the Roman conquest. It is against this background of tension and hostility that our nationalist propaganda needs to be considered.

In our analysis we propose to discuss four bodies of material: the *Sesostris Romance*, the *Demotic Chronicle*, the Nectanebo episode in the *Alexander Romance*, and the *Potter's Oracle*. This material is far from homogeneous. The *Demotic Chronicle* is entirely Egyptian in language and content⁹. In the other three cases, although the matter which they all contain is Egyptian to some degree, it has been refracted through a Greek medium. The surviving texts of the *Potter's Oracle* are written in Greek, but are evidently based on a translation from an Egyptian original¹⁰; the other two sources are available only in Greek, but are not translations and may well have undergone severe cross-cultural distortion. Therefore, great circumspection is needed if the last two sources are to be used as evidence for *Egyptian* propaganda.

The Sesostris Romance

The *Sesostris Romance* does not survive in any Egyptian source. The earliest extant version appears in Herodotus (II, 102–110), but subsequently it figures prominently in Classical literature down to the end of Antiquity¹¹. Under these circumstances a great deal of the Egyptian colouring has inevitably been eroded, but there is no difficulty in defining the essential character of the aims of the original. During its long career the *Romance* underwent considerable development in detail, but its basic structure remained absolutely consistent: Sesostris is presented as a king of Pharaonic Egypt who combines the qualities of the ideal administrator with those of a great conqueror who had succeeded in subduing substantial parts of Europe, Asia and Africa. The tradition of his conquests in the first two continents shows considerable development until in the Hellenistic versions they embrace the Erythrean Sea as far as India, the whole of Asia, and a large part of Eastern Europe¹².

⁹ See below p. 41ff.

¹⁰ See below p. 50ff.

¹¹ The bibliography on the Sesostris-legend is substantial. See in particular K. Sethe, 'Sesostris', *Untersuchungen*, II, 1, Leipzig, 1900; G. Maspero, 'La Geste de Sésostri', *Journal des Savants*, 1901, p. 593ff.; H. Kees, *RE*, IIA, 1861ff.; R. M. Rattenbury in J. U. Powell (Ed.), *New Chapters in the History of Greek Literature*, 3rd Ed., Oxford, 1933, p. 211ff.; M. Braun, *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature*, Oxford, 1938, p. 223ff.; K. Lange, *Sesostris*, Munich, 1954; G. Posener, *Littérature et Politique dans l'Égypte de la XII^e Dynastie*, Paris, 1956, p. 141ff.; G. Goossens, 'La Légende de Sésostri', *La Nouvelle Clío* 10–12 (1958–62), p. 293ff.; M. Malaise, 'Sésostri', pharaon de légende et d'histoire', *CdÉ* 41 (1966), p. 244ff.; S. West, 'The Sesonchosis Romance' in B. Reardon (Ed.), *Erotica Antiqua*, Bangor, 1977, p. 47ff.

¹² D. S., I, 53–5; Strabo, XV, 1, 6 (C687); XVI, 4, 4 (C769), 7 (C770). See, in general, Malaise, *op. cit.*, p. 252ff.

A careful analysis of the *Romance* reveals an extremely complex stratigraphy. The starting point is clearly historical reminiscence of the Pharaohs of the Twelfth Dynasty (2000–1780 B.C.), three of whom were called Senwosret/Sesostris. The achievements of these rulers made a profound impression on the historical consciousness of the Egyptians, and the figure of Sesostris came to embody and subsume this historical experience in Egyptian tradition. This was then contaminated from various sources. In the first place, Sesostris attracted and assimilated reminiscences of the achievements of post-Twelfth Dynasty kings. Ramesses II probably suffered this fate¹³. Shoshenk I of the Twenty-second Dynasty certainly did¹⁴. This development was complicated by a further factor: the Egyptian ideal of kingship. To the Ancient Egyptians Pharaoh was the incarnation of the god Horus, and the champion of the cosmic order in all its aspects. In theory, and to some degree in practice, there was a definite programme or schema of action to which kings were expected to conform. The dominant figure of Sesostris was assimilated to this ideal and became, to a large extent, an embodiment of it. Specific historical references were then eroded, and he tended to become the archetype of Pharaoh. This complication was aggravated by the influence of folklore. Like all dominant figures of legend Sesostris attracted errant folk-motifs, e. g. the treacherous brother¹⁵ and the culture-hero motifs¹⁶.

At this point in the legend's evolution we are confronted with a figure who is, to all intents and purposes, the ideal Pharaoh. What, however, is the reason for the progressive extension of his conquests? The key is provided by Herodotus at II, 110:

This man (sc. Sesostris) was the only Egyptian monarch who ever ruled over Ethiopia. He left as memorials the stone statues which stand in front of the temple of Hephaestus, two of which, representing himself and his wife, are thirty cubits in height, while the remaining four, which represent his sons, are twenty cubits each. These are the statues, in front of which the priest of Hephaestus, very many years afterwards, would not allow Darius the Persian to place a statue of himself; 'because', he said, 'Darius had not equalled the achievements of Sesostris the

¹³ It is probable that the δύο ἀνδριάντες of Herodotus, II, 110, are to be identified with two colossi of Ramesses II at Mit Rahineh, the site of the Memphite temple of Ptah-Hephaestus. (I shall discuss this point further in the forthcoming third volume of my introduction and commentary to Herodotus' second book.)

¹⁴ This is proved by the confusion in Classical texts between the name *Sesostris* (and variants) and *Sesonchosis* (and variants) (see Malaise, op. cit., p. 247).

¹⁵ Herodotus, II, 107. This world-wide motif is one of a large corpus built around good and bad relatives (S. Thompson, *The Folktale*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1977, p. 113ff.; id., *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, IV, Copenhagen, 1957, K2210).

¹⁶ Herodotus, II, 108–9. On this motif see Thompson, *The Folktale*, p. 305ff.; id., *Motif-Index*, I, Copenhagen, 1955, A510ff.

Egyptian: for while Sesostris had subdued quite as many nations as Darius had done, he had likewise conquered the Scythians, whom Darius had failed to master. It was not just, therefore, that he should erect his statue in front of the dedications of a king whose deeds he had been unable to surpass'. Darius, they say, pardoned these words.

The crucial point to grasp in relation to this passage is the fact that, despite the claims of Herodotus' priests, no Egyptian king had *ever* conquered Scythia. Why, then, did they say that Sesostris had? What has clearly happened is that the conquests of the ideal Egyptian king have been fictitiously extended to surpass those of Egypt's Persian conquerors. When we turn to the later versions of the *Sesostris Romance* and compare the conquests of the Hellenistic Sesostris with those of Herodotus' Sesostris we find that a spectacular increase has taken place. We should expect a correlation between the contemporary situation and the legend. If we compare the conquests of the Hellenistic Sesostris with those of Alexander the Great we find a most striking parallel: again the achievements of the Egyptian hero have been made to equal those of the most recent conqueror of Egypt!¹⁷

How well does the *Sesostris Romance* fit our characterization of propaganda? In the first place, since it is being used to console the national pride of the Egyptians for the severe bruising which it had received from a series of foreign conquests, it is evidently intended to buttress their sagging national self-confidence and, *ipso facto*, their sense of national identity. This aim it attempts to achieve by restoring or reinforcing confidence in Egyptian cultural ideals, one of the most tenacious of which was the conviction of Egyptian cultural and military superiority¹⁸. In its emphasis on the ideal of kingship it also reaffirms one of the basic postulates of Pharaonic culture. The spectacle of

¹⁷ Comparable unhistorical extensions of Egyptian conquests with similar motives are identifiable in other texts: in the Demotic Petubastis Cycle Pedikhons, son of Inarus, fights Serpot, Queen of the Amazons, in Assyria, then becomes her ally and subsequently joins her in the conquest of India (A. Volten, *Ägypter und Amazonen*, Vienna, 1962); in an unpublished Demotic story of the first-second century A. D. Imhotep and Zoser are described as capturing the Assyrian capital of Nineveh (J. W. B. Barns, 'Egypt and the Greek Romance', *Akten des VIII. internationalen Kongresses für Papyrologie. (Mitt. aus der Papyrussammlung der österreichischen Nationalbibliothek V)*, Vienna, 1956, p. 33); a Rainer Demotic papyrus dating to the reign of Augustus implies that a campaign of reprisal against the Assyrians took the Egyptians as far as Nineveh and that here they recovered the shrines of Egyptian gods which had been removed during an Assyrian invasion of Egypt (J. Krall, 'Vom König Bokchoris. Nach einem demotischen Papyrus der Sammlung Erzherzog Rainer', *Festgaben zu Ehren Max Büdinger's*, Innsbruck, 1898, p. 8).

¹⁸ This point is well discussed by W. Helck in his study 'Die Ägypter und die Fremden', *Saeculum* 15 (1964), p. 103ff.: see also S. Sauneron, 'L'Avis des Égyptiens sur la cuisine Soudanaise', *Kush* 7 (1959), p. 63ff. On the concept of Pharaoh's world dominance see Alan B. Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II. Introduction*, Leiden, 1975, p. 96ff.; B. J. Kemp in P. D. A. Garnsey and C. R. Whittaker (Eds.), *Imperialism in the Ancient World*, Cambridge, 1978, p. 8ff.

the triumphs of Sesostris also provides, on the level of fantasy, a fulfilment for the political and military aspirations of an Egyptian people so frequently denied in later times those triumphs which both religious dogma and millennia of history insisted ought to be theirs. Furthermore, by placing the Egyptian conqueror on a par with the foreign subjugators of Egypt the foreigner's capacity for inspiring fear has clearly been attenuated. The principle of humiliating the enemy also shows itself in the Herodotean account of the stern rebuke administered by the priest of Hephaestus to Darius. The medium also satisfies our characterization in that it exemplifies a familiar Egyptian genre; for narratives elaborating on the deeds of kings occur in a large number of laudatory inscriptions, hymns and tales¹⁹. The principle of confident assertion is equally in evidence, at least in the Herodotean version. It should finally be observed that the *Romance* also operates at a symbolic level in that, to the Egyptian, Pharaoh encapsulated the very essence of his civilization, and that Sesostris, as the embodiment of the Pharaonic ideal, functions as a symbol of Egypt itself – and, what is more, of Egypt triumphant.

We have, then, no difficulty in identifying many of the features of propaganda enumerated at the beginning of this paper, and doubtless we could isolate more if we had an Egyptian version, but we are still left with two problems which must be solved if we are to assign the label 'propaganda' to the *Romance* with complete confidence: what group created it, and who was the target? When considering the first issue three points need to be borne in mind. First, the *Romance* shows a high degree of familiarity with traditional Egyptian concepts. Secondly in the Hellenistic Period Egypt's cultural elite, the bastion of its civilization, was the priests. Thirdly, Herodotus II, 110 makes it clear that priests were prepared to purvey a version of the *Romance*. All this places it beyond reasonable doubt that it was the priests themselves who were largely, if not completely, responsible for it. The target? On the face of it there is a temptation to explain the legend as being designed for foreign consumption, first the Persians and subsequently Greeks and Macedonians, but the clear insistence on Egyptian values leaves little room for doubt that at least as important – probably much more so – was the gnawing anxiety of the priests to shore up native Egyptian culture, above all, confidence in that culture, in the face of pressure from that of alien conquerors.

¹⁹ E. g. the Poetical Stele of Tuthmose III (*Urkunden*, IV, p. 611ff.; trans. J. B. Pritchard (Ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Princeton, 1955, p. 373ff.), the Twelfth Dynasty hymns in honour of Senwosret III (Sethe, *Lesestücke*, p. 65ff.; trans. W. K. Simpson (Ed.), *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, New Haven and London, 1973, p. 279ff.) and the Story of Sinuhe (A. M. Blackman, *Middle-Egyptian Stories*, Brussels, 1932, p. 18ff.; trans. Simpson (Ed.), op. cit., p. 61ff.).

The Demotic Chronicle

The misleadingly named *Demotic Chronicle* is to be found on the recto of a papyrus in the Bibliothèque Nationale (BN E. G. 215)²⁰. Provenance and paleography indicate that it was produced in Lower Egypt, and paleographical considerations commit us to a date in the first half of the Ptolemaic Period no later than the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes II (246–21)²¹.

The text is not a chronicle at all but a collection of oracles accompanied by their interpretations. It is probable that the source of the oracles, and at least some of the interpretations, was the temple of the ram-headed god Harsaphes at Herakleopolis in Middle Egypt²². All the oracles refer to kings of Egypt ranging from Amyrtaeus (c. 404–398) to the last native Egyptian Pharaoh Nectanebo II (c. 358–41). Whether the oracles all belong to a series of prophecies of the Ptolemaic Period, as Spiegelberg thought, or derive from several different periods is uncertain²³, but it is evident that they were recorded in their extant form because they were regarded as being directly relevant to a contemporary situation in the reign of Ptolemy III. What exactly that was is unclear, but a good guess would be that the oracle had some connection with the political pretensions of a local aristocratic family, quite possibly descendants of the Herakleopolitan dynasts who are known to have dominated the area during the Ethiopian and Saïte Periods and certainly remained a power in the land as late as the early Ptolemaic Period²⁴. Be that as it may, the fundamental theme of the text is that only those kings will endure who live in accordance with the will of the gods. One source of distress to those who do not which is mentioned several times is foreign invasion. The Persians get a bad press on two occasions (IV, 22–3; V, 15 ff.), and the same holds true of the Greeks:

²⁰ Text, transcription and translation will be found in W. Spiegelberg, *Die sogenannte demotische Chronik*, Leipzig, 1914. For other translations see G. Roeder, *Altägyptische Erzählungen und Märchen*, Jena, 1927, p. 238ff. and E. Bresciani and S. Donadoni, *Letteratura e poesia dell' Antico Egitto*, Turin, 1969, p. 551ff. For discussions of the document in whole or in part see M. Pieper, *RE* XVI, 2236ff.; P. Kaplony, 'Bemerkungen zum ägyptischen Königtum, vor allem in der Spätzeit', *CdÉ* 46 (1971), p. 250ff.; J. H. Johnson, 'The Demotic Chronicle as an Historical Source', *Enchoria* 4 (1974), p. 1ff.; Kaplony, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, I, 1056ff., s. v. Demotische Chronik.

²¹ Spiegelberg, op. cit., p. 4: cf. Kaplony, *LdÄ* 1056.

²² The arcane nature of the material and the Herakleopolitan bias are sufficient to justify confidence on this point (cf. Spiegelberg, op. cit., p. 5; Kaplony, *CdÉ* 46, p. 252ff.; Johnson, op. cit., p. 5).

²³ Spiegelberg, op. cit., p. 6ff.; E. Meyer, 'Ägyptische Dokumente aus der Perserzeit', *SPAW* 1915, p. 288ff.

²⁴ Cf. Kaplony, *CdÉ* 46, p. 258. On the history of this family, the 'Shipmasters' of Herakleopolis, see K. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt*, Warminster, 1973, pp. 234ff., 402ff.; P. Tresson, 'La stèle de Naples', *BIFAO* 30 (1930), p. 369ff.

(*Oracle*) 'The young men who are on the roads, they stand upon the road with their chins in their hands'.²⁵

(*Interpretation*) That means: it happens again at this very time that it is the Greeks²⁶ who come to Egypt and rule Egypt for a long time (VI, 19–20).

(*Oracle*) 'The dogs live'.

(*Interpretation*) That means: the great dog, he finds something to eat . . . (VI, 21).²⁷

Deliverance, we are told, will come from a native Egyptian ruler:

A man of Herakleopolis it is who will rule after the foreigners (sc. the Persians) and the Greeks (II, 25).

(*Oracle*) 'Rejoice, then, prophet of Harsaphes!'²⁸

(*Interpretation*) This means: the prophet of Harsaphes rejoices after the Greeks; (for) a ruler has arisen in Herakleopolis (III, 1).

At III, 2 this ruler is associated with the opening of temples and with causing offerings to be brought. All these events will bring great blessings to Herakleopolis. There is possible reference to rebellion on his part and an unequivocal reference to his equipping himself for war. He enjoys the approval of Isis, and, above all, rules in accordance with the will of the gods.

When we relate this material to our characterization of propaganda we find that it fits very closely indeed. The interest in buttressing the audience's sense of security is immediately evident in the determination to strengthen its awareness of cultural identity. This determination appears in several ways. In the first place, the text insists on 'pinpointing' foreign enemies and activating xenophobia²⁹. This technique can be exemplified many times over in political propaganda for the simple reason that nothing is more effective than a common hatred in forming and consolidating in-group sentiments. Secondly, we find that cultural axioms are reinforced, pre-eminently by asserting the abiding validity of the Egyptian ideal of kingship. At first sight this formulation may seem surprising in the light of the comparisons frequently drawn with the concept of history exemplified in the Old Testament, particularly in the Books of Judges, Kings and Chronicles³⁰. Certainly the language of the *Demotic Chronicle* is reminiscent of these Biblical texts: the

²⁵ An Egyptian gesture of mourning (Spiegelberg, op. cit., p. 21, n. 8).

²⁶ *W'inn* lit. 'Ionians', the standard Demotic term for Greeks (W. Erichsen, *Demotisches Glossar*, Copenhagen, 1954, p. 80).

²⁷ For the significance of this sentence see n. 36.

²⁸ Note that the term 'prophet' here is the traditional, though misleading, English rendering of the Egyptian *hm-ntr*, 'god's servant', and does *not* imply prophetic activity.

²⁹ See above, p. 35.

³⁰ E. g. Meyer, op. cit., p. 298ff.; Johnson, op. cit., p. 3.

divine will is usually denoted by the term *hp*, 'law' (II, 16; III, 16; IV, 1, 6, 10, 12 etc.), and is described on one occasion as the *mj(.t) p3 ntr*, 'the way of god' (IV, 7), which Spiegelberg aptly compared to the Hebrew phrase *děřēkh Yāhwēh*, 'the way of Yahweh'³¹. However, close consideration will reveal that the concepts and terminology of the *Chronicle* can be firmly rooted in native Egyptian tradition: the Egyptians speak as early as the New Kingdom of the *hpw nw m3't*, 'the laws of *ma'at*, (sc. the cosmic order which Pharaoh was responsible for maintaining)'; Pharaoh and the gods can receive such epithets as *smn hpw*, 'establisher of laws', and *nb hpw*, 'lord of laws'³²; the *Chronicle* twice describes the good king, i. e. the king who lives in accordance with the law, as *mnḥ* (V, 22; VI, 3). Since a *mnḥ* king is in earlier texts one who rules in accordance with *ma'at*³³, we are justified in assuming that *hp*, 'law', is essentially a late equivalent of *m3't* in this context. The *Chronicle* is certainly unique in our documentation both in its panorama of royal catastrophe and in its determination to explain it as the consequence of a series of failures to recognize and integrate with the divine order. Where earlier texts almost invariably assume that Pharaoh was *ex officio* in harmony with *ma'at*, the *Chronicle* concedes that many are not. Where they assumed that the ideal was automatically realized by all tenants of the office, the *Chronicle* recognizes that many fell far short. This development is not, however, difficult to explain. From the end of the New Kingdom until the Macedonian conquest Egyptian history had been punctuated by long periods of fragmentation of authority which could not but diminish the aura of omnipotent and ineffable godhead surrounding the Pharaonic office. This in no way involved the denial of the king's divinity, but inevitably inspired a greater willingness to ascribe to him a more human susceptibility to error and retribution. This tendency could only have been confirmed by the almost unbroken sequence of political and military disasters which afflicted the country after the Persian conquest (525 B.C.). These needed explaining, and, what is more, explaining in terms of the Egyptian world-view. It was a basic principle of Egyptian moral thinking that integration with the divine order meant success, in earthly and every other sense. Failure was, in itself, an indication that the divine order had been violated. The *Chronicle's* solution to the failures of the last three centuries was the frank and uncompromising acceptance that this doctrine must apply to kings as well as to common mortals. The wisest policy to adopt, here as elsewhere, is to recognize that the Egyptian and Hebrew concept of man's

³¹ Op. cit., p. 18, n. 3. On the *Chronicle's* use of *hp* see C. F. Nims, 'The Term HP "Law, Right" in Demotic', *JNES* 7 (1948), p. 246.

³² *Wb.*, II, p. 488, 13, 19.

³³ Lloyd, 'Once More Hammamat Inscription 191', *JEA* 61 (1975), p. 57, n. 18.

relationship to a divinely sanctioned and maintained cosmic order were always basically similar and that similar formulations would be a natural consequence³⁴.

Another common ingredient of propaganda occurring in our text is the wish-fulfilment element which figures clearly in the imaginary spectacle of the expulsion of foreigners and the resuscitation of an Egyptian national state based on ancient Pharaonic ideals. We also find that an attempt is made to strip the enemy of his capacity to inspire fear when the text exploits the device of name substitution: at V, 15 the enemy is described as 'Herds of Wild Game', and thereby assimilated to the forces of chaos; for wild game was traditionally associated in Ancient Egypt with Typhonic forces³⁵; again, at VI, 21, foreigners, probably Greeks and Macedonians, are called 'hounds', and one of

³⁴ In his acute analysis of Late Period biographies E. Otto comments, 'es gibt einige Stellen, die deutlich zeigen, dass gegenüber der Allmacht Gottes die Macht des Königs als irdisch empfunden wird' (*Die biographischen Inschriften der ägyptischen Spätzeit*, Leiden, 1954, p. 117). He summarizes the development of this idea in the Demotic Chronicle as follows: '... der Gott-König denselben absoluten ethischen Gesetzen unterworfen erscheint wie jeder Sterbliche, womit zwar die ägyptische Ethik ihren höchsten Punkt erreichte und über die Geschichte triumphieren konnte, wodurch aber zugleich jene Einheit für immer zersprengt wurde, die allein Ägypten zu dem gemacht hatte, was es durch zweieinhalb Jahrtausende gewesen war: Die Identität von Ethik und Königtum, der Glaube an die sichtbare Offenbarung des Willens Gottes in der Person des Königs, die prästabilisierte Harmonie zwischen Macht und Moral' (op. cit., p. 188). There is clear evidence of similar concepts in Ptolemaic temple-reliefs (E. Winter, *Untersuchungen zu den ägyptischen Tempelreliefs der griechisch-römischen Zeit*, Vienna, 1968, p. 100ff., a reference which I owe to Dr. Mark Smith). Parallels earlier than the Late Period are not plentiful, but two obvious examples spring to mind. In the *Instruction for Merikarē* (c. 2070 B. C.) the putative royal author clearly confesses his own error and the retribution which followed (69ff., 119ff., A. Volten, *Zwei altägyptische politische Schriften* (Analecta Aegyptiaca IV), Copenhagen, 1945, pp. 37, 65), and implies throughout the text that kings who fail to act in accordance with the moral order will be visited with disaster. In a document written after his death the heretic Pharaoh Akhnaten (c. 1372–54 B. C.) is described as *p3 hrw n 3ht-itn*, 'the fallen one of Akhetaten' (A. H. Gardiner, 'The Inscription of Mes' in K. Sethe (Ed.), *Untersuchungen*, IV, Leipzig, 1905, p. 11). Since the term *hrw* is frequently used of foreign rulers at war with Egypt, and, therefore, in league with the forces of Chaos, its application to Akhnaten ranges him unequivocally with the latter. There can be little doubt that the disasters ascribed to the aftermath of Akhnaten's reign in Tut'ankhamun's restoration-stele were regarded as divine retribution for his iniquitous behaviour (text: *Urkunden*, IV, 2027, 11–14; trans. J. Bennett, 'The Restoration Inscription of Tut'ankhamun', *JEA* 25 (1939), p. 9).

³⁵ This point emerges particularly clearly in the symbolism of sacrifice in Ancient Egypt: see H. Junker, 'Die Schlacht- und Brandopfer und ihre Symbolik im Tempelkult der Spätzeit', *ZÄS* 48 (1910–11), p. 69ff.; H. Kees, 'Bemerkungen zum Tieropfer der Ägypter und seiner Symbolik', *NAWG* 1942, 2, p. 71ff.; P. Derchain, *Le Sacrifice de l'Oryx. (Rites Égyptiens I)*, Brussels, 1962, p. 28ff.

them, probably Alexander the Great, is described as 'the Great Hound'³⁶. Both medium and source follow the classic propagandist pattern. The medium was a familiar one to the Egyptian since it had close affinities with messianic and lamentation literature which, in some form or another, was of extreme antiquity³⁷. There is reason to believe that the source of the prophecies is of unimpeachable authority; for it seems probable that, if we had the entire text before us, we should find that the prophecies were claimed to emanate ultimately from the god Harsaphes himself³⁸. Furthermore, the message, as we should expect of propagandist material, is expressed in the form of confident assertion. We also seem to be confronted with the spectacle of a power group, the priests of Herakleopolis, producing material which may well have been designed to buttress the political aspirations of a local family of dynasts. Indeed the fact that Herakleopolitan dynasts actually functioned as High Priests of Harsaphes at an earlier period suggests that some of these priests may have had an immediate family interest in such activities. Whatever the probabilities on the political front, however, it is certain that the *Demotic Chronicle* would have had the effect of re-inforcing political, social and religious ideas which it was in the priests' interest to maintain.

³⁶ The identifications, which are as old as Brugsch (*Ägyptologie*, 2nd Ed., Leipzig, 1897, p. 489), have given rise to considerable debate. Spiegelberg was attracted, but cautious (op. cit., p. 22, n. 2). Meyer (op. cit., p. 302, n. 1; cf. Kaplony (*CdÉ* 46, p. 259ff.)) rejected Brugsch's suggestion. However, the positioning of the passage is a strong argument in its favour. The only serious objection is that, given the text's hostile attitude to foreigners, we should expect the symbolism to be pejorative whereas a dog metaphor or simile in Egyptian texts normally conveys either the notion of obedience or of speed (H. Grapow, *Die bildlichen Ausdrücke des Ägyptischen*, Leipzig, 1924, p. 75ff.). We are rescued from this dilemma by 1.7 of the Stele of Regnal Year I of Amasis where the latter describes his foe Apries in the terms: *ir.n.f m̄ tsm hr h3t*, 'It was like a dog on a corpse that he acted' (G. Daressy, 'Stèle de l'An III d'Amasis', *Recueil des Travaux* 22 (1900), p. 3: I have confirmed in Cairo the reading of this much-damaged text at the relevant point). This fits our context perfectly.

³⁷ Useful discussions are C. C. McCown, 'Hebrew and Egyptian Apocalyptic Literature', *HThR* 18 (1925), p. 357ff.; Posener, *Littérature et Politique dans l'Égypte de la XII^e Dynastie*; G. Lanczkowski, *Altägyptischer Prophetismus*, Wiesbaden, 1960.

³⁸ On Harsaphes in general see H. Bonnet, *RÄRG* p. 287ff., s. v. Herischef. Apart from the *Demotic Chronicle* there seems to be no other reference to his prophetic activities, but the *Chronicle* is in complete accord not only with other statements about prophecies emanating from ram-headed gods (on which see L. Kákósy, 'Prophecies of Ram Gods', *Acta Orientalia* 19 (1966), p. 341ff.), but also with the fact that Harsaphes was identified with Khnum of Elephantine who was certainly a god of prophecy in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods, an attribute doubtless derived from his role as a creator-god (R. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, Leipzig, 1904, p. 125; Bonnet, op. cit., p. 139; Kákósy, op. cit.).

Nectanebo and the Alexander Romance

The Alexander Romance was composed c. 300 A.D. by an unknown Alexandrian Greek³⁹. It seems to draw on two main sources: a Hellenistic history of Alexander's career written within the tradition of Cleitarchus and, therefore, showing the more objectionable features of Hellenistic historiography; a conglomeration of pseudo-historical letters including a letter-romance of c. 100 B.C. This amalgam was then seasoned by matter from other source including inventions of the author himself⁴⁰. The episode which concerns us, the tale of Nectanebo, is just such an addition.

The Nectanebo episode occupies the first fourteen chapters of the *Romance*⁴¹. It may be summarized as follows: Nectanebo, historically the last native king of Egypt, was a master magician who, amongst other things, was able to destroy the foes of Egypt by sorcery. Through his magic arts he divined the impending conquest of Egypt by Artaxerxes III (341) and fled the country. It was, however, prophesied that he would return in the following terms (Ch. 3):

He who fled Egypt as a powerful, strong and aged king will return to the plain of Egypt after a while as a young man, having set aside his aged form and having travelled the world, giving us the subjugation of our enemies.

In his travels, Nectanebo eventually arrived at Pella, the Macedonian capital, and set himself up there as a prophet and *astrologos*. His reputation grew to such an extent that Olympias, the future mother of Alexander, sent for him while Philip was away on campaign. Nectanebo became enamoured of her and

³⁹ The Greek text of several versions will be found in G. Kroll, *Historia Alexandri Magni*, Berlin, 1958 (1926); L. Bergson *Der griechische Alexanderroman Rezension β*, Uppsala, 1965; U. von Lauenstein, *Der griechische Alexanderroman Rezension Γ*, Bk. I, Meisenheim am Glan, 1962; H. Engelmann, *Rezension Γ*, Bk. II, Meisenheim am Glan, 1963; F. Parthe, *Rezension Γ*, Book III, Meisenheim am Glan, 1969; J. Trumpf, *Anonymi Byzantini Vita Alexandri Regis Macedonum*, Stuttgart, 1974. Versions in Latin, Armenian, Syriac, Ethiopic, Hebrew, Arabic and Coptic (fragmentary) are also extant. For an English translation see E. H. Haight, *The Life of Alexander of Macedon*, New York, 1955.

⁴⁰ See A. Ausfeld, *Der griechische Alexanderroman*, Leipzig, 1907; R. Merkelbach, 'Die Quellen des griechischen Alexanderromans', *Zetemata* 9 (1954); L. L. Gunderson, 'Early Elements in the Alexander Romance' in B. Laourdas and Ch. Makaronas, *Ancient Macedonia*, Thessaloniki, 1970, p. 353ff.; Fraser, op. cit., I, p. 675ff.

⁴¹ This section of the *Romance* is discussed in depth by E. A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Magic*, London, 1899 (repr. 1975), p. 91ff.; Pieper, op. cit., 2238ff.; O. Weinreich, *Der Trug des Nectanebos, Wandlungen eines Novellenstoffs*, Leipzig and Berlin, 1911; Braun, op. cit., p. 21ff.; Merkelbach, *Zetemata* 9 (1954), p. 57ff.; Fraser, op. cit., I, p. 680ff.; Merkelbach, 'Mythische Episoden im Alexanderroman' in S. Sahin, E. Schwertheim and J. Wagner (Eds.), *Studien zur Religion und Kultur Kleinasien. Festschrift für Friedrich Karl Dörner (EPRO 66)*, II, Leiden, 1978, p. 606ff. See also A. Spalinger, 'The Reign of King Chabdash: an Interpretation', *ZAS* 105 (1978), p. 144ff.

resolved to win her by exploiting his reputation as a magician. He, therefore, prophesied that she would become pregnant by the god Ammon of Libya and promised that this god would come to her in a dream. After having had the dream she desired to see the god by day and talk to him. Nectanebo then asked for a room in the palace next to hers. The god duly appeared, first as a snake, then as Ammon, then Herakles, then Dionysus, and finally as Nectanebo himself with whose assistance the prophesied conception took place. Alexander was eventually born, and Nectanebo became his tutor. Then, in a curious episode, Alexander killed him, and Nectanebo was buried with much pomp and circumstance in the Macedonian capital.

The stratification of the Nectanebo episode is at least as complex as that of the *Sesostris Romance*. The influence of Hellenistic Greek and Roman civilization is clear in such features as the emphasis on astrology (Ch. 4, 12) and the interest in lecanomancy (Ch. 1, 3)⁴². Folk elements are equally in evidence, e. g. the return of the hero (Ch. 3)⁴³, and the hero as a trickster (Ch. 6)⁴⁴ and a shape-shifter (Ch. 6 and 10)⁴⁵. Reflections of events in Macedonian and Egyptian history are equally clear⁴⁶. However, the bedrock of

⁴² Astrology only becomes a significant feature of Egyptian culture from the beginning of the Hellenistic Period under Near Eastern influence, but it subsequently enjoyed a brilliant career in the country (F. Cumont, *L'Égypte des Astrologues*, Brussels, 1937, p. 155ff.; W. Kroll, 'Aus der Geschichte der Astrologie', *N. Jahrb.* 7 (1901), p. 559ff.; Bonnet, op. cit., p. 750ff.). There is no satisfactory evidence for lecanomancy in Pharaonic times but it appears relatively often in the Graeco-Roman and Coptic Periods when its Persian origins are clear. It was certainly widespread in the late Roman world (J. Capart, 'Les anciens Égyptiens pratiquaient-ils déjà la lécanomancie?', *CdÉ* 19 (1944), p. 263; J. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte*, Louvain, 1959, p. 172ff.).

⁴³ A classic example is provided by the legendary promise of the return of King Arthur (cf. Thompson, *Motif-Index*, I, Copenhagen, 1955, A580; id., *The Folktale*, p. 264).

⁴⁴ On this widely current folk motif see Thompson, *Motif-Index*, IV, Copenhagen, 1957, K passim; id., *The Folktale*, p. 319ff.; P. Radin, *The Trickster. A Study in American Indian Mythology*, New York, 1978; G. S. Kirk, *Myth. Its Meaning and Function in Ancient and Other Cultures*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971, Index, s. v. tricksters; id., *The Nature of Greek Myths*, Harmondsworth, 1977, index, s. v. tricks, tricksters. The appearance of Nectanebo as a trickster is not without parallel in Egyptian tradition; for, as Pharaoh, he is the incarnation of Horus, and Horus appears as a trickster in the Myth of the Contendings of Horus and Seth (H. Goedicke, 'Seth as a Fool', *JEA* 47 (1961), p. 154; F. T. Miosi, 'Horus as a Trickster', *SSEA Journal* 9 (2) (1979), p. 75ff.).

⁴⁵ For this motif see Thompson, *Motif-Index*, II, Copenhagen, 1956, DO-D699; id., *The Folktale*, index, p. 490, s. v. Transformation; Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, index, s. v. transformations.

⁴⁶ The hostility between Philip II and Olympias (Ch. 4, 10, 14) and Alexander's involvement with Zeus Ammon of Siwa (Ch. 4ff.) are amply documented (J. R. Hamilton, *Alexander the Great*, London, 1973, pp. 31, 40ff., 75ff.). The flight of Nectanebo II in the face of foreign invaders is also historical, though the true direction was south (D. S., XVI, 51, 1; F. K. Kienitz, *Die politische Geschichte Ägyptens vom 7. bis zum 4. Jahrhundert vor der Zeitwende*, Berlin, 1953, p. 107; E. Drioton and J. Vandier, *L'Égypte*, 4th Ed., Paris, 1962, p. 611ff.).

the episode looks very Egyptian indeed. Pharaoh was a master of rituals; Nectanebo is a master-magician. Even more obvious is the fact that the details of Alexander's conception closely reflect the Egyptian myth of the theogamy. According to this doctrine the king was the physical son of Amon-rē' who was claimed to visit the queen incarnated as her husband the Pharaoh⁴⁷. The most obvious explanation of this amalgam is that the starting point was a theogamy asserting that Alexander was the son of Nectanebo and that this theogamy was elaborated by a series of accretions, probably at various times, before being pressed into service by the author of the *Romance*. What was the source of this theogamy? There can be little doubt that it was Egyptian. In the first place Nectanebo had already become a subject for Egyptian popular tales as early as the second century B.C., as is demonstrated by the *Dream of Nectanebo* where he figures as an embodiment of the ideal Pharaoh⁴⁸. Secondly, only Egyptians would be anxious to convert Alexander into the son of the last native king of Egypt. Finally, the quantity and quality of the Egyptian material would be inexplicable on any other hypothesis. Clearly we are dealing with an Egyptian claim that Alexander was conceived and born according to the ancient dogmas of kingship. What stratum of Egyptian society produced it? The emphasis on the doctrine of the theogamy suffices in itself to prove that it must have been priestly. Indeed, the facts that Nectanebo's family originated in Sebennytus and that this family is known to have survived into the Ptolemaic Period as a force to be reckoned with raise the distinct possibility that priests of this city may have been involved⁴⁹. What of the date? It seems unlikely that the ancestry of Alexander would be so pressing an issue as to generate such a story long, if at all, after his death. The most obvious date would be immediately after the Macedonian conquest in 332, in any event not later than the early third century B.C.

How well does the episode fit our conception of propaganda? Two motives seem to lie behind it. It is immediately evident that there was a desire to reconcile the presence of a foreigner on the throne with the traditional Egyptian theory of kingship. However, the second aspect takes us further in that it shows the Egyptians explicitly laying claim to Alexander's conquests.

⁴⁷ See J. Vandier, *La Religion Égyptienne*, 2nd Ed., Paris, 1949, p. 140ff.; Bonnet, op. cit., p. 380ff., s. v. König; H. Brunner, *Die Geburt des Gottkönigs*, Wiesbaden, 1964.

⁴⁸ The text is only extant in a Greek papyrus of the early second century B. C. (B. Lavagnini, *Eroticorum Fragmenta Papyracea*, Leipzig, 1922, p. 37ff.; trans. G. Maspero, *Les Contes Populaires de l'Égypte Ancienne*, Paris, N. D., p. 219ff.), but the thoroughly Egyptian character of its subject-matter leaves no room for doubt that it derives from an Egyptian prototype (cf. Pieper, op. cit., 2237ff; Fraser, op. cit., I, p. 681ff.; Spalinger, op. cit., p. 145). The reason for the Greek translation was presumably to present to the Graeco-Macedonian rulers of the country the Egyptian view of what a king ought to be.

⁴⁹ Kaplony, *CdÉ* 46, p. 257ff.; cf. Spalinger, op. cit., p. 143.

The son of Nectanebo will come '... giving us the subjugation of our enemies'. We are, therefore, faced with the spectacle of the national pride of the Egyptians reconciling itself to the humiliation of foreign conquest by converting the world-conqueror into a reincarnation of the last Egyptian Pharaoh, i. e. they deny that a *foreign* conquest has taken place at all!⁵⁰

In all this it will be obvious that the same propagandist aims and mechanisms are at play as were isolated in the *Sesostris Romance*. However, the Nectanebo legend has several further twists. Propaganda often attempts to strip the opposition of its capacity to inspire fear by presenting it in a humiliating, ludicrous or contemptuous fashion. This tendency clearly emerges in the account of Nectanebo's getting the better of the Macedonian by his magical prowess. The details of this episode, however, take us into deeper waters. It is surely highly significant that this triumph takes the form of the sexual submission of the Macedonian queen to the Egyptian Pharaoh. It might be countered that such an act is an essential part of the doctrine of theogamy, and that we need look no further for an explanation of its presence, but in this instance we are justified in searching for additional dimensions since an Egyptian original simply concerned with the theogamy as such would not have provided so circumstantial an account of Nectanebo's seduction of the queen (cf. Ch. 4 ff.) as seems to underlie the version in the *Alexander Romance*. If such details belong to that original, the latter was not *simply* an account of a theogamy, but also a wish-fulfilment projection which may have been intended to work on at least two levels. In the first place, it would satisfy, if only in imagination, the urge to circumvent the general prejudice which seems to have existed in the upper reaches of Graeco-Macedonian society towards intermarriage with the native population⁵¹, and thereby attenuate the socially and sexually humiliating implications of that attitude.⁵² In the second place, since, from a psychological point of view, *sexual* domination is often

⁵⁰ This fiction is paralleled elsewhere in ancient literature. Merkelbach (op. cit., p. 57) notes several parallels: Herodotus, I, 107ff., and III, 2, 1; the Persian tradition that Alexander the Great was the son of a Persian princess and, therefore, the grandson of Darius; the Greek claim that the Greek empress who was married to the Turkish conqueror of Constantinople was already pregnant by the emperor himself, i. e. the second sultan was really a Greek!

⁵¹ During the second and first centuries B. C. there is good evidence of increasing intermarriage in the middle and lower strata of Egyptian society, but there is no indication that this phenomenon extended to the Greek upper classes (Peremans, 'Les Révolutions', p. 45ff.). In fact it is clear that there was a distinct prejudice against such unions amongst Greeks of high rank, both within Egypt (Fraser, op. cit., I, p. 71ff.) and without (Rostovtzeff, op. cit., II, p. 1071ff.).

⁵² 'For the majority of the human race, self-esteem is chiefly rooted in sexuality' (A. Storr, *Human Aggression*, Harmondsworth, 1972, p. 97). The implications of this point when related to taboos on intermarriage need no elaboration. For an intriguing analysis of its ramifications in Black-White relations see C. C. Hernton, *Sex and Racism*, London, 1969.

tantamount to *total* domination, the episode would also have served to nurture fantasies of total triumph over the foreign invader⁵³.

The final point which we need to establish is the target. Possibly the original was intended in part for Greek and Macedonian consumption, but the foregoing analysis leaves little room for doubt that the priestly authors were pre-eminently concerned with the native population.

The Potter's Oracle

The *Potter's Oracle* is preserved complete in no surviving text. We have three fragmentary versions: P. Graf (G. 29787) of the second century A. D., P. Rainer (G. 19 813) of the third century A.D., and P. Oxy. 2332 of the late third century A. D. P. Graf contains only a fragmentary version of the introductory narrative. P. Rainer and P. Oxy. preserve portions of the oracle proper⁵⁴. All are written in Greek, of a sort, but we are informed in the colophon of P. Rainer that the text had been 'translated as far as possible'. Although such claims are a *topos* of Greek literature emanating from Egypt, there is no doubt that the original was indeed composed in some form of Egyptian, almost certainly Demotic⁵⁵. The date of the composition of the original has been the

⁵³ Cf. Hernton who comments (op. cit., p. 72) '... having sexual relations ... is one way of destroying or mutilating the enemy'.

⁵⁴ The best text is that of L. Koenen ('Die Prophezeiungen des "Töpfers"', *ZPE* 2 (1968), p. 178ff., supplemented by his 'Bemerkungen zum Text des Töpferorakels und zu dem Akaziensymbol', op. cit., 13 (1974), p. 313ff.). For discussions see U. Wilcken, 'Zur ägyptischen Prophetie', *Hermes* 40 (1905), p. 544ff.; C. H. Roberts in E. Lobel and C. H. Roberts, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, XXII, London, 1954, 2332; Koenen, op. cit.; id., 'The Prophecies of a Potter: a Prophecy of World Renewal becomes an Apocalypse', *Proceedings of the Twelfth International Congress of Papyrology (American Studies in Papyrology 7)*, Toronto, 1970, p. 249ff.; Fraser, op. cit., I, pp. 71, 210ff; 509, 681ff., 716; Peremans, op. cit., p. 40.

⁵⁵ Manetho made this claim (*FGrH* 609, F. 10), and was clearly, in broad terms, justified. In the present instance the statement is confirmed by the closeness of the *Oracle's* affinities to extant Egyptian material (Roberts, op. cit., p. 90) and the whiff of 'translationese' which pervades it, e. g.: attributing the oracle to a potter has no point in Greek but, if we assume that it renders the Egyptian *kd*, 'fashioner' (*Wb.*, V, p. 73, 15), or *nb nhp*, 'Lord of the Potter's Wheel' (op. cit., II, p. 294, 12), the potter becomes none other than the creator-god Khnum who is known to have been associated with prophecy (see above, n. 38); the term *θεοτόκος* used to describe Memphis is unique in pre-Christian literature and is best explained as a translation of the Egypt *mshnt*, 'birthplace', which expresses the doctrine that cities could be the birthplaces of gods (Koenen, *ZFP* 2, p. 178, n. 1). The fact that such an anti-Greek text should appear in the Greek language may seem surprising, but it should be remembered that the extant versions all date to the Roman Period. The probable evolution of the *Oracle* is that it was composed in Egyptian in the second century B. C. as an expression of Egyptian hostility to the Graeco-Macedonian administration, but, with the development of a lower class of immigrant origin, a Greek-speaking class evolved whose socio-economic interests and problems were closely similar, if not identical, to those of the Egyptians. Nothing would be more natural than that the protest-literature of the latter should be taken over by Greek-speakers and developed to serve their needs (cf. Roberts, op. cit., p. 94; on Graeco-Egyptian literature in general see Fraser, op. cit., I, p. 674ff.).

subject of some debate. A recent careful analysis of the contents led Koenen to place it c. 130 B. C., and, whilst all his arguments are not equally forceful, there are no grounds for doubting the general validity of his thesis⁵⁶.

The text has two basic elements: a framework, or *roman-cadre*, which furnishes the context giving rise to the prophecy, and the prophecy itself. In the *roman-cadre* we are informed that the potter went to the Island of Helios and began to make pots in his kiln. For some reason this was considered sacrilegious, and the pots were pulled out. The potter then fell into a mantic trance through the agency of Hermes and prophesied the woeful destiny of Egypt. He was then brought before the king Amenophis to defend himself, and the prophecy was repeated. At this the king was greatly troubled and commanded that the prophecy should be recorded in a sacred book. The potter then died and was buried in Heliopolis whilst the book was deposited in a sacred treasury where it was made freely accessible to all.

The second and more important element of the *Potter's Oracle* consists of the prophecy itself in which we are given a recital of the troubles which are destined to befall Egypt. A bad king is destined to come to the country and rule in a newly founded city. The king must be Alexander and the city Alexandria. A new god will be introduced, clearly Sarapis. The inhabitants of the city are sometimes called *Typhonioi*, sometimes the *Zônophoroi*, or 'Wearers of the Belt'. At one point this foreign enemy is specifically stated to be Greek (P. Oxy. (=Koenen's P₃), 33). This disaster will bring a host of misfortunes, natural and man-made: famine, murder, the collapse of the moral order, and oppression will be rife. Invasion from Syria and Ethiopia will take place. Then civil war will arise amongst the Greeks, and the destruction of their power is prophesied in the most vivid terms (P. Oxy., 50-62):

And then the Agathos Daimon shall abandon the city which is being founded, and shall depart to god-bearing Memphis, and it shall be deserted, the city of foreigners which shall be founded among us. These things shall be at the consummation of evils when foreigners shall fall like the leaves of the trees in Egypt. And the city of the Wearers of the Belt shall be deserted like my oven through the iniquities which they have done against Egypt, and the divine statues of Egypt which were transferred there shall return to Egypt, and the city on the coast shall be a drying-place for fishermen through the departure of the Agathos Daimon and Memphis to Memphis so that men walking through it can say, 'This was the nourisher of all in which every race of men dwelt'.

When this had been fulfilled, a king who would reign for fifty-five years would come to Egypt from Helios with the assistance of Isis. He would inaugurate a

⁵⁶ Koenen, *ZPE* 2, p. 186ff. This does not exclude the possibility that some of its ingredients are older (cf. Fraser, *op. cit.*, I, p. 683ff.). A brief, if unnecessarily sceptical, discussion of the dating problem is given by Peremans, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

golden age of justice, harmony and bliss after the iniquitous and godless rule of the Greeks.

When we come to consider this text in the light of our earlier analysis of propaganda, we find that it fits in the most detailed way. Its role as a buttress for the Egyptians' sense of security emerges in several respects. In the first place, the oracle expresses a profound hatred and contempt for the Graeco-Macedonian rulers of the country who are projected as violators of traditional values and behaviour and as flying full in the face of the divinely sanctioned moral order. Here the Egyptians' sense of national identity is being confirmed by the simple device of pinpointing an enemy and subjecting him to lengthy and bitter abuse⁵⁷ so that a common focus of hatred is created. In addition major postulates of Egyptian culture receive reinforcement. Once more we find the Egyptian king being projected as the champion and sole guarantor of an ordered universe. At the same time the traditional corollary is also emphatically stated, i. e. that foreigners are the agents of chaos. Insisting on these two principles the *Oracle* clearly conveys the message that salvation will be found in adherence to traditional Pharaonic values. In our discussion of propaganda we emphasized the importance of imaginative wish-fulfilment. This also figures in the *Oracle*; for the hatred of the foreigner as well as the Egyptians' self-contempt is intended to receive assuagement at the level of fantasy in the contemplation of the imaginatively portrayed destruction of Macedonian power. The spectacle presented is an apocalyptic vision of bliss after dissolution and chaos directly comparable to Jewish and Christian apocalyptic – a fact not particularly surprising since societies under oppressive regimes and similar pressures frequently have recourse to apocalyptic fantasies⁵⁸. Here the vision is reinforced by the use of symbol; for the desolation of Alexandria symbolizes the destruction of Macedonian power just as the restoration of the Egyptian gods to Memphis symbolizes the triumphant resurgence of the old Egypt⁵⁹. As often in propaganda a determined effort is

⁵⁷ See above p. 42.

⁵⁸ The term 'apocalyptic' is easily abused. It is best defined as a prophecy of cosmic dissolution and reintegration in a new age of unalloyed righteousness and harmony. The *Oracle's* apocalyptic dimensions have been well discussed by Koenen (*opera cit.*). The relationship of such material to social and political oppression and distress is copiously illustrated in N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, London, 1970.

⁵⁹ The *Oracle* is not the only papyrus document to prophesy the destruction of a city. In *PSI* 982 (third century A. D.) a clear parallel occurs, though the fragmentary nature of the text makes it impossible to establish details. The surviving lines suggest that it may refer to the destruction of Alexandria and the expulsion of its hated Jewish element. A Demotic text of the Roman Period, probably a prophecy, speaks of the destruction of Memphis in a context which involves Greeks in some capacity, but the mutilated condition of the papyrus does not permit a closer identification of the subject-matter (see W. J. Tait, *Papyri from Tebtunis in Egyptian and in Greek*, London, 1977, p. 45ff.).

made to neutralize fear of the enemy. Here this is done pre-eminently by emphasizing the internal instability of the Ptolemaic royal house⁶⁰. Name-substitution is also exploited; for the text does not usually refer to the Greeks as *Hellenes* but by the words *Typhonioi* or *Zônophoroi*, the first certainly, the second probably, highly charged with traditionally sanctioned pejorative overtones: the first assimilates the Greeks *to*, and stereotypes them *as*, foes of the cosmic order who, according to time-honoured religious concepts, are eventually and inevitably overcome by Pharaoh, the champion of order⁶¹. The second probably brands them as uncouth and militaristic barbarians⁶². The principle that the medium should be familiar is also observed; for the *Oracle* fits perfectly into the traditional genres of prophetic and lamentation literature⁶³, both in structure (*roman-cadre*)⁶⁴, and motifs⁶⁵. The necessity of an

⁶⁰ Koenen, P₂ 28 = P₃ 49–50.

⁶¹ See above, p. 36. The association of foreign invaders with Seth/Typhon and wickedness emerges particularly clearly in P. Louvre 3129 = P. BM 10252 (*Urkunden*, VI, 17ff.) and also in Manetho, *FgrH* 609, F. 10 (237), where the adjective *Typhônios* is used of Avaris, the capital of the detested Hyksos invaders of Egypt.

⁶² In our text, where the pejorative overtones are so strong, a Greek reader would certainly have associated the *Zônophoroi* with militarism since the word ζώνη can be associated even in purely Greek contexts with soldiers as well as barbarians (*LSJ* p. 759 (b), s. v. ζώνη). Indeed the late phrase οἱ ὑπὸ ζώνην, 'soldiers', is highly reminiscent of it. A more difficult question is whether it reflects an Egyptian prototype. There are good reasons for believing that it does. First of all, in the Egyptian *Instruction of Merikarē* (ll. 106–7), in a context describing preparations for war, we read *pḏ(w)t pw ṣṣpt 'gsw*, 'It is the barbarians who have put on their 'gsw'. Although the precise meaning of 'gsw is uncertain, this and other passages indicate that it is a leather girdle of some kind particularly associated with soldiers and labourers (H. Brunner, *Die Lehre des Cheti*. (Äg. Forschungen 13), Glückstadt and Hamburg, 1944, p. 31, 5, 8). If so, *Zônophoroi* might well reflect some such Egyptian phrase as *hryw 'gsw*, 'Bearers of the 'gsw', referring either to soldiers in general or foreigner in particular. Since it is certain that the Greek text of the *Oracle* is based on an Egyptian prototype, it is reasonable to assume that key words or phrases have Egyptian counterparts, i. e. *Zônophoroi* ought to translate or paraphrase an Egyptian word or phrase. The similarity to the suspected meaning of our *Merikarē* passage is so close that the hypothetical *hryw 'gsw*, or a conceptually similar expression, must become a very strong candidate indeed.

⁶³ On these genres see the references in n. 37.

⁶⁴ I. e. the writer places his material within the framework of a tale after the fashion of Chinese boxes. The most famous example is the Arabic *Thousand and One Nights* where the tales are told within the tale of the relations between Sheherazade and Hārūn al-Rashīd. Ancient Egyptian literature abounds in examples. In some cases it is stories which are placed within framework, as in the Westcar Papyrus and the Shipwrecked Sailor. In other cases the insert consists of a wisdom text (e. g. the Wisdom of Ptahhotpe). In yet other cases it is a prophecy comparable to the *Potter's Oracle*, e. g. the *Prophecy of Neferty*. The composer of the *Oracle* could have chosen no more familiar constructional principle (cf. Koenen, *ZPE* 2, p. 182ff. and in general G. Posener in J. R. Harris (Ed.), *The Legacy of Egypt*, Oxford, 1971, p. 236ff.).

⁶⁵ E. g. the concomitants of disaster described in the *Oracle* are traditional: improper burial, *Oracle*, P₃, 6~*Neferty*, 41ff.; *Admonitions*, 2, 6–7; impairment of the processes of birth, *Oracle*, P₂, 26–7~*Admonitions*, 2, 4; disruption of the natural world, *Oracle*, P₂, 6–8 etc.~*Neferty*, 24ff.;

authoritative source is also recognized; the *Oracle* is delivered by a potter who has long been recognized as an incarnation of the prophetic creator-god Khnum⁶⁶; he was inspired by Hermes, i. e. Thoth, the god associated with arcane knowledge and prescience in such collections as those of Petosiris and Nechepso and the Hermetic Books as well as in older literature⁶⁷; the prophecy is accepted and recorded by king Amenophis who appears to have been an important figure in Egyptian historical tradition⁶⁸. We also find the principles of confident assertion, repetition and selectivity equally in evidence. What of the source of all this? Who was the propagandist? Since the *Oracle* shows a profound knowledge of traditional Egyptian literary forms as well as all the apparatus of prophetic literature, our answer on this score must be the same as with the three bodies of material already discussed. It was a priestly group of some kind⁶⁹. This is not, of course, to deny that it was subsequently tinkered with by less expert hands. As for the target, it will be self-evident from everything said up to this point that the *Oracle* is attempting to provide a justification for continued confidence in the principles on which Egyptian civilization was based. That can only mean that it is the native Egyptian at whom the original text was aimed, whatever uses were found for it in subsequent centuries.

oppressive taxation, *Oracle*, P₂, 8-9~*Neferty*, 50ff.; fratricide and the murder of wives, *Oracle*, P₂, 10-12~*Neferty*, 44ff.; overthrow of the social order, *Oracle*, P₃, 4-9~*P. BM 5645*, r. 11-12; *Neferty*, 54ff.; *Admonitions*, 2, 7ff., 14; 4, 1; 9, 3ff.; transference of gods from Egypt by her conquerors, *Oracle*, P₂, 34-5~ the *P. Dem. Rainer*, published by Krall, op. cit., p. 8; W. Spiegelberg, *Demotische Inschriften* (CCG), p. 17; the Satrap Stele (*Urk.*, II, 14) and Pithom Stele (*Urk.*, II, 91ff.), both translated in E. Bevan, op. cit., pp. 28ff. and 388ff. respectively; the failure of the Nile, *Oracle*, P₂, 1-2~*Neferty*, 26ff. The death of the prophet after delivering his message (*Oracle*, P₂, 51-2) is also paralleled (Manetho, *FGrH* 609, F. 10 (236); *P. Dem. Rainer*, 1.c.).

⁶⁶ See above n. 36 and Koenen, *ZPE* 2, p. 183ff.

⁶⁷ On Hermes/Thoth in general see P. Boylan, *Thoth, the Hermes of Egypt*, Oxford, 1922; A. Rusch, *RE* VI (A), 351ff.; R. Pietschmann and G. Roeder in G. Roscher, *Auführliches Lexikon der gr. und röm. Mythologie*, V, 825ff.; Bonnet, op. cit., p. 805ff.; C. J. Bleeker, *Hathor and Thoth*, Leiden, 1973, p. 106ff. For Thoth as the source of the prophecies of Petosiris and Nechepso see W. Kroll, op. cit., p. 569ff. For convenient summaries of his role in Hermetic literature consult T. Hopfner in Bonnet, op. cit., pp. 289ff., s. v. Hermes Trismegistos; 290ff., s. v. Hermetische Schriften.

⁶⁸ Cf. Manetho, *FGrH* 609, F. 10 (discussed by Fraser, op. cit., I, p. 508ff.; see also p. 684ff.). The name is based on the royal name Amenhotep borne by four rulers of the XVIIIth Dynasty. The achievements of the first three evidently generated a composite legendary figure comparable to Sesostris and Rhampsinitus.

⁶⁹ Establishing the cult-centre is no easy matter. The pre-eminence of Khnum in the *Oracle* raises the obvious possibility that it was Elephantine, and the highly nationalistic attitude typical of Upper Egypt would go some way towards corroborating this suspicion. On the other hand, the claims of Herakleopolis are not to be ignored: in the first place, Khnum could be identified with Harsaphes, the chief god of Herakleopolis (see above n. 38); secondly, we have good evidence of the nationalistic pretensions of this city (see above p. 45; thirdly, its priests are known to have had a taste for propagandist literature (see above p. 41ff.).

In this paper I have been concerned to achieve two main aims: to define the distinctive features of propaganda and to establish the extent to which we are justified in applying that description to four bodies of Egyptian material of the Hellenistic Period usually regarded as propagandist. This procedure has led us to a clearer picture of the precise nature of that material and has, above all, enabled us to penetrate to its psychological basis. The study of the ancient examples in the light of modern cases has amply demonstrated that they both have similar aims, conscious or unconscious, and that identical techniques of communication are frequently exploited. This is not, of course, to suggest that the ancient texts were produced by a carefully directed and elaborately organized propaganda-machine comparable to those with which we are familiar, or that their authors aimed at such a wide audience, or that they were concerned with such sophisticated devices as the saturation principle of 'total propaganda', all of which are dependent on mass education, mass media, and a degree of centralized control impossible in the conditions of Antiquity. What we are evidently confronted with is the handiwork of groups within the priesthood who were nationalistically orientated, in some cases with a distinct local bias, and concerned with controlling the attitudes of a native Egyptian audience. In the nature of things, this audience could not have been seen as the Egyptians at large, but rather as the small educated elite of the population, pre-eminently the priesthood and the survivors of the Pharaonic aristocracy and official class who would alone have been accessible to propaganda delivered in a literary medium and who were, in any case, the decisive factor on which the survival of Pharaonic Egypt depended. Our analysis has further suggested that we are not confronted primarily with political propaganda, at least in the naïve sense in which the phrase is often used, but with symptoms of a profound cultural unease. All four examples are best regarded as *cultural* propaganda motivated by a keen awareness of the mortal danger to which Egyptian culture was exposed. To the modern student, however, they have a further dimension in the deep sense of poignancy which they convey; for, unlike the Egyptian composers of the *Sesostris Romance*, the *Demotic Chronicle*, the *Nectanebo logos*, and the *Potter's Oracle*, the modern scholar knows that, at the last, there was to be no saviour, no king from the Sun to bring a Golden Age, that it was not the words of the Egyptian seers which were destined to be fulfilled, but rather the utterances of the Hebrew prophet delivered centuries before:

And the sword shall come upon Egypt . . . , and her foundations shall be broken down . . . and I will make the land waste, and all that is therein, by the hand of strangers . . . I will also destroy the idols, and I will cause their images to cease out of Noph; and there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt (Ezekiel, 30:4, 12, 13).



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EXPLAINING INCEST: BROTHER-SISTER MARRIAGE IN GRAECO-ROMAN EGYPT

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Formally accepted types of incestual union present one of the most problematic and yet potentially revealing fields in the study of basic human relationships. Attested historical instances, however, are rather scarce. For that reason alone, the society of Graeco-Roman Egypt (from c. 300 B.C. to A.D. 300), which provides an unusually well-documented case, is of considerable interest. For a period of about three centuries, a significant proportion of all marriages noted in official Roman census declarations were between full brothers and sisters. An analysis of these data, and of the precise historical and social context of the persons mentioned in them, supports the argument that there were special circumstances that led those concerned to override 'normal' inhibitions against close-kin marriages and sexual relationships. The reasons for their doing so were specific to their social situation and cannot be invoked loosely in arguments concerning strategic differences in kinship and marriage patterns between the eastern and western Mediterranean regions.

Introduction

One of the oldest, and firmest, of anthropological premisses is the supposition that incest taboos, prohibitions and regulations are amongst the most fundamental generative elements in systems of social relationships, especially those constructed on models of kinship (Goody 1990: 320-1, recapitulating Tylor 1889; Westermarck 1891 [1922]; Durkheim 1963 [1897]; Freud 1918 [1912-13]; White 1948; Parsons 1954; and, above all, Lévi-Strauss 1969 [1949]).¹ It follows, as a corollary of that supposition, that an understanding of the rationale behind the rules of behaviour governing incestuous relationships is in some sense central to a better comprehension of how social systems are formed, and of why they work in the ways they do (Goldthorpe 1987; Arens 1986; Hopkins 1980: 304-11). The problem is that there are several rather distinct types of human behaviour that are encompassed by the simple term 'incest'. A clear understanding of these distinctions seems to have been bedevilled by a real overlap, and therefore confusion, between restrictions on endogamic marriage and prohibitions on sexual relations (Goody 1956; Fox 1967; Bagley 1969). Moreover, the peculiar values attached to incest in Western 'high' culture, that have been elaborated in metaphoric domains far beyond that of the simple act itself, have so coloured our perception as to produce serious impediments to a clear understanding of the social problem (Arens 1986; Twitchell 1987). To these two sources of distortion must be added the fact that the overwhelming concern of

modern sociological and social-work literature has been on incest as a form of abuse (Rubin & Byerly 1983; Young 1985). That seems, perhaps, to point to the need for a more specific typology that must be made within the general category of 'incest', one that would have to deal with relations of power as well as the mere action. Esposito's study (1981) indicates that even for contemporary society in the United States one can clearly separate out certain categories of behaviour (some of particular relevance to this article) which he has labelled 'consensual incest', in which he includes some types of brother-sister and uncle-niece relations. He contends that there are major distinctions between many of these cases and other categories, especially father-daughter relations, which appear to be characterized by the use of force against the unwilling. The distinction is critical since, as just noted, it is the latter case that dominates modern sociological analyses and has become the 'classic' instance that first comes to mind, precisely because it is the most problematic for social work in contemporary 'advanced' societies. The paradox then emerges that, although 'there is a general consensus that sibling incest is much more prevalent than any other type of incest', there is almost no concern with this type simply because it is not perceived as a great social problem (Bank & Kahn 1982; Herman & Hirschman 1981; Young 1985: 81). Indeed, in a typical study, Renvoize (1982) felt able to lump all forms of incest apart from the paradigmatic father-daughter case into 'other than father-daughter' instances.

Before beginning my presentation of the particular historical case of incest to be analyzed here, I should therefore like to make a preliminary distinction between a broader and a narrower type of action that might be labelled as incestuous (White 1948; Fox 1962; Bagley 1969; Goody 1956; 1990: 319-21). First of all, one can speak of types of sexual acts (with no assumptions about other cultural connexions such as marriage) between persons in defined relationships to each other (e.g., father-daughter), which are forbidden by the moral and social norms prevalent in the society concerned. Linked to this more fundamental form, but in some clear analytical senses to be separated from it, is a form in which marriage bonds (and therefore sexual relations) take place within nominally prohibited degrees of kinship and social boundaries normally set by the societies concerned. This investigation is primarily concerned with the second, somewhat narrower and weaker sense of 'incest'. As Goody has cautioned, however, even within this second type distinctions must be made: 'Even if we restrict our attention to the prohibitions within the elementary family, it is necessary, both from a cultural perspective and from a more general analytic one, to distinguish sexual intercourse within generations from that between generations' (Goody 1990: 320). My analysis will take another look at a rather well-documented case of incestuous behaviour of the former of these two types (that is to say, incestuous behaviour between siblings) in a situation that was apparently regarded as both normal and acceptable by the persons directly involved, even though it would have been considered unacceptable and abnormal in terms of the values embraced by the wider society of which they were part.

Close-kin marriage in the Graeco-Roman world

The historical case with which I shall deal concerns the rather large number of firmly documented marriages between brothers and sisters in Egypt of the Roman period (roughly speaking, the first three centuries A.D.). The relevant documentary material has been known for well over a century, and has been subject to a number of studies during that period (see Kornemann 1923: 17n2, who refers to studies from the turn of the nineteenth century; for subsequent treatments, see Bell 1949; Henne 1954; Hombert & Préaux 1949; Middleton 1962; Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1955; 1956: 342-8; 1964, amongst others). Of all these studies, however, by far the most sophisticated and analytically satisfying (and this by a considerable margin over the others) is the detailed description and analysis that has been provided by Keith Hopkins (1980). Based on a near-exhaustive sorting of all the available primary data, his study must form the basis of any further serious discussion of the subject. A brief review of Hopkins's conclusions is therefore in order, not only for the purpose of setting forth a minimum of information on which the case can be adequately understood, but also to dispel what are likely to be fundamental misunderstandings of (or possible objections to) the nature of the evidence itself.² Despite their apparent 'hoary antiquity', the Egyptian data are not a matter of mere antiquarian interest. They provide intensive and clearly documented evidence of a consistent human behaviour extending over at least three centuries (indeed, probably much longer than that, as I shall argue below). They directly challenge assumptions commonly made about the universality of certain types of incest taboos (Rubin & Byerly 1983; Young 1985: 5-8). The Egyptian data not only bring into question the supposed universality of such rules, but also cast doubt on basic explanations and theories that have been offered for typical human behaviour. Goody has recently re-emphasized the significance of this case: 'one striking feature of domestic life [in Egypt of the period] was that marriage was permitted, even encouraged, between brother and sister, whose union has often been considered prohibited by a universal taboo on "incest", that is, on sexual relations within the elementary family of father, mother, daughter and son'. Hence, 'the Egyptian material must lead us to modify generally accepted ideas about the universality of the incest taboo... to this extent, the ball is back in the sociological court and the game is a matter of identifying contingencies that may over-ride widespread tendencies' (Goody 1990: 319, 338).

There can be little doubt that 'widespread tendencies' were being overridden. Our word 'incest', and its conception, is closely linked to moral, social and legal norms established in Graeco-Roman antiquity. The Latin word *incestum*, basically meaning ritually 'unclean' (i.e., not-*castus* or not-pure), connoted a sense of moral revulsion at specifically polluting forms of sexual intercourse. In more formal terms, however, the word *incestum* referred to a moral and legal stain incurred by committing an act that was forbidden by state laws in the context of 'illegal' or unacceptable types of marriage bonds, especially those marital links which might involve members of the social upper classes (an important point for our argument here). Inter-marriage between such 'pure' higher status persons and specific sorts of undesirable social inferiors was regarded as a type of pollution against which the social order had to be protected, even, if need be, by formal

legislation (Glötz 1969 [1900] and Humbert 1969 [1900] are the standard encyclopaedia entries; see also Guarino 1943; Lotmar 1912). Those norms varied, sometimes markedly, in the world of the city-states and empires of the ancient Mediterranean (Goody 1983), but in no circumstances did they ever envisage marriages as close as those between full brothers and sisters as being even remotely acceptable (Weiss 1908). There were, however, significant differences between Roman and Greek values and behaviours that are relevant to my argument. For example, Roman 'rules' and social practices regarding incestuous marriages, being rather hostile to parallel cousin and closer-kin marriages, were rather more stringent than those found in most Greek city-states (Treggiari 1991: 105-18). This too, is clearly reflected in the semantics of incestuous behaviour. Whereas the Romans had a hard, precise term, *incestum*, to specify such forbidden relationships, the Greeks did not. In fact, until the third and fourth centuries A.D., they continued to use elaborate periphrastic expressions to designate what we would call 'incest'; it was only after the Christianization of their society that neologisms were created specifically to designate such prohibited marriages and relationships (Rudhardt 1982: 731-3). The long survival of the earlier circumlocutions in the Greek world indicates, in itself, a different attitude towards close-kin marriages.

By comparison with the Romans, the Greeks were indeed far more inclined towards endogamy and close-kin marriage, with cousin-marriage and the *epiklerate* (i.e., the enforced marriage of a widow to her husband's brother or closest male kinsman) being typical examples of their practices (Weiss 1908; Erdmann 1934: 179-89). In so far as such matters can be determined, in the society of the Greek city-state there was greater concern with direct ascendant-descendant incest – as evidenced, for example, by the story of Oedipus and many other such mythical instances (Rudhardt 1982). In their social practices and values, Greek societies were, on the whole, more closely related in type to other societies of the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East that favoured closer degrees of in-marriage than they were to those in the western Mediterranean, which did not (Shaw & Saller 1984; Goody 1983; 1990: chs. 11-13, 15; Ziskind 1988). In this sense, they fell in with the 'great divide' in social practices between eastern and western Mediterranean that has persisted in historical continuity from antiquity to the present day (Holy 1989; Goody 1990). Concern with sibling incest was certainly less emphatic, to the extent that half-brother/half-sister marriages were clearly permitted (Erdmann 1934: 181 sqq.; Keyes 1940: despite his own arguments; for the legal situation in Athens, see Harrison 1968). Both records of actual marriages, and the popular assumptions embedded in forms of literature such as the novel, do indeed affirm that such close-kin marriages actually took place and could be arranged by the parents of the prospective spouses. The fact that they were 'permitted' and 'could be arranged', however, cannot be taken as a simple index of their deeper acceptability to the persons concerned. In this case, the story retailed in a piece of 'popular' literature concerning just such a marriage must give some pause. The tale is told in the novel by Achilles Tatius entitled *Leukippe and Kleitophon*, in which it is announced that the hero, Kleitophon, is to enter an arranged marriage with his half-sister Kalligone.³ Kleitophon

reports that one night, not long after receiving this news, he had the following dream:

I saw my sister's body and mine grown together into a single body from the navel down, and separating into two above. Over me there hovered a huge, fearsome woman who glowered at me savagely: eyes shot with blood, rough cheeks, snakes for hair, a sickle in her right hand, a torch in her left. In a wild attack, she aimed her sickle at our groin where the two bodies joined, and severed the girl from me.

Kleitophon then describes how he woke up in a terrible fright, and 'decided to tell no one, but brooded over my troubles privately'. While some of the message of the dream sequence might be 'explained away' by the requirements of the novel's *mise-en-scène*, its explicit content surely evokes a manifest concern over the propriety of such marriages.

That marriages and sexual relations between very close kin were much frowned upon is also evident from the use made of charges of incestuous behaviour in the political arena in city-states such as Athens – charges that often had serious consequences for the accused. 'Slandorous' allegations of covert brother-sister marriage or sexual relations were sufficient to provoke outrage and divorce (Cox 1989: esp. 40 sqq.). How deeply rooted these values were in the social structure of the Greek city-state is also substantiated by a striking piece of primary data which conveys to us the interpretation the Greeks themselves placed on dream messages, such as the one experienced by Kleitophon in the story retailed above. The evidence comes from the work on dream interpretation by Artemidorus of Daldis, one of the great positivist analysts and reporters of the lives of 'average persons' of his own world.⁴ In the fifth book of his technical manual he reports the following dream:

A man dreamed of shitting into a bushel measure (*choinix*). He was caught having sexual intercourse with his own sister. The bushel is a measure, and a measure is like a law/social convention (*nomos*), so, in a certain sense, he was transgressing the laws/norms set down in common for the Greeks.

In the world of the Greek city-state, therefore, there seems to have been some ambiguity in attitudes towards close-kin marriages. Certainly cross and parallel cousin marriages were regarded as normal and acceptable. That positive evaluation, however, when judgements spilled over into the more questionable area of half-brother/half-sister marriage, tended to become more obscure and dubious. Finally, full brother-sister marriage, and the type of sexual contact it normally entailed, seems to have evoked feelings of deep revulsion. This ambiguity is also reflected in the 'mythical' materials produced by Greek-speaking communities. Whereas ascendant-descendant relations were regarded as absolutely forbidden in these stories, the attitudes revealed in them towards brother-sister relations were far more equivocal. Indeed, such close relationships seem to have been viewed with increasing hostility with the strengthening of state power over the first five centuries B.C. The exception on all occasions, however (an exception of some relevance to our argument), was that such incestuous relations were always perfectly acceptable 'amongst the gods' (Rudhardt 1982: 733-9, 760-1).

It has been persuasively argued that these general Greek attitudes towards acceptable marriages became part of a Hellenistic *Rechtskoinê* or common system of legal values and norms that were transplanted to the Graeco-Macedonian successor conquest kingdoms that dominated the eastern Mediterranean and the

Near East after the death of Alexander the Great (Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1964: 60–1). That is to say, the norms of the Greek *polis* which clearly permitted, and even encouraged, marriages between cousins, and which allowed for half-brother/half-sister marriages, were part of the cultural package taken abroad by Greek emigrants to their new lands of settlement. Those values, however, also included clear prohibitions against marital and sexual relationships that fell within those proscribed bounds. Hence, so far as we can tell, these values were ones that were normatively subscribed to by the Greek inhabitants of the land of Egypt, the successor kingdom ruled by the family of Ptolemy (one of Alexander’s generals), who will be the principal subjects of our investigation. Not only did the Greek settlers in Egypt bring these formal values with them, but later they also became subject to the ‘more stringent’ incest norms typical of Roman society in the west, following on the Roman incorporation of Egypt as a province of empire in the final decades B.C. Most importantly for us, incest was clearly regarded as a crime that could be tried before the Roman Prefect (governor) of Egypt (BGU 4.1024). A Greek or Roman inhabitant of the land could reasonably expect to be able to bring such a charge before a court, as did one Antonius who threatened to charge his father-in-law, one Sempronius, on the grounds of incest (P.Oxy. 2.237, vii, 19–29; Whitehorne 1978: 245).

The evidence for brother-sister marriage and its interpretation

The primary evidence for the incidence of brother-sister marriages in Roman Egypt is provided by ancient census records (on these see, in general, Wallace 1938 [1969]: ch. 7; Hombert & Préaux 1952; Nachtergaele 1974; Nelson 1979;

TABLE 1: A typical Roman-Egyptian census return.

Source:	P. Meyer 9
Location:	Arsinoë (Faiyûm)
Date:	Census of AD 145/46 (declared in 147)
Translation:	<p>To Maximus, Strategos of the Heraklid District (<i>meris</i>) in the Arsinoite Nome, and to Herakleides, Royal Scribe of the same District, and to Sabinus and Antoninus, Secretaries of the Metropolis, and to [x...], Ptolemaios and Sarapion, the census takers (<i>laographoi</i>), and to Apion, local headman (<i>amphodarch</i>) of the city-quarter Dionysios’ Place, from [x....] registered in the district ‘First Goosepens’ (<i>Chênoboskiôn Prôtôn</i>), through my administrator Aphrodisios son of Philip [...]</p> <p>[There depend on] me [...] in the Metropolis located in the Quarter of ‘The Macedonians’ one-eighth of a house and its atrium and courtyard, in which I declare for the required ‘Household-by-Household Census’ (<i>kat’ oikian apographê</i>) for the 9th Year, just elapsed, of the Caesar and Lord Antoninus [= AD 145–46] in the city-quarter Dionysios’ Place, for which I had already made a previous declaration for the ‘Household-by-Household Census’ in the 16th Year of the Divine Hadrian [= AD 131–32], the residents listed below:</p> <p>Charês, son of Atarias, son of Dionysios, whose mother Charition was the daughter of Aphrodisios. Atarias was a Settler (<i>katoikos</i>) belonging to the (original) 6475, beyond the age subject to the tax (<i>hyperetês</i>), age 71, without any distinguishing marks,</p>

and his [i.e., Charês'] wife who is also his sister from the same father (*kai toutou gynaike ousan homopatrian adelphên*), Heroïs, whose mother, Tertia, daughter of Didymos, was a Settler (*katoikos*), declared in the 16th year of the Divine Hadrian in the same city-quarter, Dionysios' Place, 41 years old, without any distinguishing marks,

and (their) two children, Atarias, 21 years old, without any distinguishing marks, registered (*epikekrimenos*) among the Settlers (*katoikoi*), and his wife, who is also his sister from the same father and the same mother (*kai tên toutou gynaike ousan autou homopatrian kai homomêtrian adelphên*), Athenarion, 13 years old, without any distinguishing marks,

and Charition, also known as Theodotê, daughter of Charês, 11 years old, without any distinguishing marks, and Didymê, another daughter of Charês, [x...] years old, without any distinguishing marks,

and [x...] son of Dioskoros, whose mother Rhodous, daughter of Dioskoros, is registered in the census as a privileged personal tax-payer (*epikekrimenos idîôtês*), 40 years old, without any distinguishing marks,

and the slavish bodies [i.e., slaves] that belong to Aphrodisios, namely [x ..., y...] years old, without any distinguishing marks, and her child, Pasion, known as Eutykhês in the household-accounts, 20 years old, without any distinguishing marks, and Harpalos, known as Nikêphoros in the household-accounts, 18 years old, without any distinguishing marks, and Heroïs, 8 years old, without distinguishing marks,

and [x...], another female slave, [x...] years old, without distinguishing marks,

and Isidôra, also known as Hêdistê, another female slave, 23 years old, without distinguishing marks, and her child Aphrodous, also known as Parinous, 6 years old, without distinguishing marks,

and [x...] another female slave, [x...] years old, without distinguishing marks, these female slaves were declared in the 16th year [i.e., of the Divine Hadrian] by my children Philip and Charition. I am declaring them here.

[In a second hand:] Received and registered by the Strategos in the 10th Year of Antoninus, Caesar and Lord, on the 14th Epeiph [= 8 July, AD 147].

[In a third hand:] Received and registered by the Royal Scribe in the 10th Year of Antoninus, Caesar and Lord, on 14th Epeiph.

[In a fourth hand:] Received and registered by the Secretary of the Polis on 14th Epeiph.

Note: This census return is typical in that it follows the general form found in most census returns; it is from the Faiyûm (the regional source of three-fifths of all recovered census documents); it is from Arsinoë, the single village that has produced the most modern finds; and it is from the general period to which most of the surviving census returns date. Of course, it also has some atypical features. It is longer and more complete than most surviving census forms (many of which survive only in fragments). And not one of the persons listed in it has any distinguishing marks (usually moles, scars, or such). The careful notation that the declarant's father, Atarias, was a *katoikos* (Settler) of the 6475 means that he was classed as belonging to the hereditary category of the original 6,475 Greek adult male heads of households who came as settlers to the region – a remarkable continuity of the establishment and maintenance of a *numerus clausus* as the hallmark of a privileged ethnic group, since in this case the identification must go back to the original Ptolemaic colonial settlement of the region some three and a half centuries before this declaration was made.

for a typical example, see table 1). Every fourteenth year between A.D. 5/6 or 12/13 (Montevecchi 1976: 72-4) and 257/8 the Roman government of the province of Egypt ordered a 'household-by-household' count of all persons in the land (*kat'oikian apographê*, as it was called in the technical Greek jargon of the administrators). About three hundred of these returns now survive, recorded in Greek, the official administrative language of the government (table 2). Of the 275 census returns used by Hopkins in his study, only 172, which list 880 persons, 'were sufficiently informative and legible to be used' (Hopkins 1980: 315).⁵ To obviate any dispute over the reliability of this evidence, one must state categorically that there is no reasonable doubt that the persons involved in the sibling marriages recorded on these census reports were genuine sisters and brothers. The terms 'brother' and 'sister' are not being used loosely, or metaphorically, but in the strict and ordinary senses in which we normally understand them. To quote Hopkins's own summation: 'It is worth stressing that we are dealing here not with occasional premarital sex between siblings, abnormal but condoned, but with lawful, publicly celebrated marriages between full brother and sister, replete with wedding invitations, marriage contracts, dowries, children, and divorce' (1980: 303-4). The documents available from the census returns would seem to indicate that between one-sixth and one-fifth of all marriages were in this category. 'In the usable census returns, brother-sister marriages account for between 15-21 percent of all ongoing marriages (N = 113)'.⁶ Hopkins concludes with a statement which, though concordant with the rest of his analysis, will be critical to the quite different interpretation that I shall give to these data: the claim that the surviving census returns 'are probably representative of a wider Egyptian population' (1980: 304).

One of the first types of explanation offered for the Egyptian phenomenon was that of social tradition or habit: the inhabitants of Roman Egypt were copying the known practices of their ancestors of the pharaonic period (brother-sister marriage was supposedly a 'well-known' practice indulged in by the Pharaohs). But there is no substantial historical evidence to demonstrate that brother-sister marriage was either known or commonly practised by 'ordinary' Egyptians in the pharaonic period – that is, before the advent of Graeco-Roman rule. Detailed studies of what quantitative data survive (Thierfelder 1960: 7 Sqq.; Pestman 1961: 2-5) certainly substantiate this negative conclusion. Though qualitative evidence (e.g., of a few intra-dynastic marriages in pharaonic circles) might give the impression that the practice was of some frequency, Černý's analysis of around five hundred marriages amongst the 'ordinary' people of pharaonic Egypt produced only six possible cases (all of them only half-brother/half-sister marriages) or, at best, about one per cent. of the whole. And there is, as he explicitly states, 'no certain evidence for a marriage between a full brother and sister' (Černý 1954: 29). A few such marriages were, of course, attested for the 'royal household' of the Pharaohs – the relevance of which for our investigation I shall pursue below. But the exiguous numbers do not support the common impression that the practice was a widespread one, even in this highly privileged and exceptional social milieu. The crucial point for our purposes is that clear and irrefutable evidence for the widespread practice of brother-sister marriage amongst 'ordinary persons' in Egypt is post-pharaonic.

Two simple propositions follow. First, such behaviour was not built into the Egyptian 'character' or social ethic in some transcendent fashion. Nor do we have any evidence that it was just a peculiar local social tradition. It had very precise beginnings. This conclusion is linked to a second one. There must be some definable set of circumstances that affected the persons concerned, and which must be connected to changes in the social, economic and political structures of Egypt after the end of pharaonic rule over the region, and to the subsequent imposition of foreign rule first by Greek, and then by Roman, rulers. These two fundamental propositions must form the starting point for any further investigation. My analysis, therefore, is wholly in line with Goody's call for a 'cultural approach' to the problem of incest, an analytic approach based on cultural categories (Goody 1956; 1990: 320).

What, then, do the Egyptian census documents from the Roman period tell us? 'Of 113 recorded, on-going marriages, 23 (17 certainly, 6 from perhaps to probably), 15-21 percent, were between brother and sister. Of these 23 cases, 11 or 12 were between full brother and sister (9 or 10 of the 17 certain cases), 8 were between half brother and sister (6 of the same father, 2 of the same mother); in the 3 remaining cases, it was unclear whether the married pair were full or half-siblings' (Hopkins 1980: 320).⁷ One possible objection is that the terms 'brother' and 'sister' might be being used in some sense other than our normal understanding of them. But the parents and grandparents of the declarants are regularly named in the documents, and the description normally used in the recording of brother-sister marriages is: 'my (or 'his') wife and sister of the same father and of the same mother' (*gynê kai adelphê homopatris kai homometrios*). As Hopkins observes: 'This formula leaves little room for ambiguity' (1980: 321). He then goes on to adduce a host of supporting data which clearly establish that such marriages were regarded as normal in the precise sense that they were conducted in all other respects as non-consanguineous marriages: the census declarations reveal nothing unusual about them. They were publicly declared and duly noted by the authorities. The brother-sister marriages were celebrated with the same social practices as for 'ordinary' marriages, replete with wedding invitations. Public notices of the nuptials were issued by the happy and proud parents, the usual legal and property arrangements were made (including the transfer of dowry), and the relations were crowned with all of the trappings of 'romantic love' normally associated with exogamous courting and marriage (e.g., love poetry, love letters, and other such sentimental communications).

The evidence, then, is unequivocal. Yet by the norms usually set by the Graeco-Roman world there can be no doubt that marriage, and sexual relations, between full brothers and sisters would have been regarded as incestuous. So why was it done with such apparent frequency, and with all of the appurtenances and trappings of normality? What can be offered by way of a rational explanation? Hopkins is refreshingly candid. 'It is time we moved towards an explanation of brother-sister marriages in Roman Egypt. Let me confess straight away that the end of this article is disappointing. I do not have an explanation' (1980: 327). The problem of explanation is indeed a difficult one. For one thing, the Egyptian case of incest is rather recalcitrant to received explanations. The brothers and sisters concerned seem ordinarily to have been co-resident members

of 'normal' family/household units throughout their childhood (with little or no evidence that would indicate substantial physical separation during the formative period of their upbringing). The usual explanations of attraction and avoidance posited for incestuous behaviour, from Westermarck and Freud to Fox and Shepher, seem therefore to have little direct applicability to the present case (Westermarck 1891 [1922]; Freud 1918 [1912-13], on both of whom see Spain 1987; Fox 1962; 1967; Shepher 1983). That is to say, even if these social 'norms' are considered to be generally 'lawlike', they would then constitute only a further 'natural impediment' that the Egyptian brothers and sisters had to overcome in the practice of sibling marriage. Before confessing his agnosticism on the matter of an explanation, however, Hopkins very usefully considers the series of existing explanations that have been proffered for the Egyptian data, in order to reject them one by one. It would be useful to review these again here. I do this for my own purposes, since I am largely in agreement with his analysis and wish to follow his lead in ruling out these explanations as in any way sufficient for the problem at hand.

Most of the explanations currently canvassed are based on various combinations of naked economic self-interest. First, there is the claim that brother-sister marriages were motivated by the desire to save on the expenses of dowry bequests. Hopkins refutes this on both logical and empirical grounds (1980: 322 sqq.). It has recently been revived in a modified form by Goody, who points out that Hopkins's logical objection to dowry as a factor (i.e., that dowry exchanges would tend to cancel out in the long term) does not take adequate account of the complex motives of social mobility in marriage, or of the complex nature of the assets to be exchanged (Goody 1990: 333-4). These subtleties are indeed important in analyzing any régime of property and marriage, but they do not suffice to explain the specific phenomenon of brother-sister marriage. The known facts of dowry are no different in cases of brother-sister marriage from other cases. Moreover, these same contingent factors affecting dowry exchanges were found quite widely in most other societies of the ancient Mediterranean, but nowhere else did they compel incestuous marriages.

Then again, there is the allied claim that brother-sister marriages were motivated by the economic desire to maintain family property, especially to avoid partition of the basic wealth of the time, namely land. It is indeed possible to point to known cases where peasants were willing to contemplate brother-sister marriage for precisely this sort of reason (e.g., in the well-known case reported from late medieval Montaillou by Le Roy Ladurie, 1978: 36, 52, 179 sqq.). Once again, however, Hopkins's objections must hold. Since these marriages were in fact modelled on 'normal' marriages, arranging them between siblings hardly secured much advantage. They were subject to termination by death and divorce, to reformation by remarriage, and to all the other normal responses of parents towards children's property (e.g., disinheritance).⁸ Goody (1990: 334) has attempted to reinstate the motive of keeping family property intact as a possible partial explanation by emphasizing contingent elements not fully taken into account by Hopkins. Once again, however, the riposte is not fully convincing. The contingent or attendant circumstances such as extreme pressures on scarce land resources, the need to conserve limited wealth within the family, special

considerations (the 'heirloom' factor, the unusual market or familial value of a particular piece of land) certainly did exist. But they were never sufficient to provoke so extreme a response as brother-sister marriage anywhere else in the Mediterranean (certainly in any known Graeco-Roman society). Hopkins's final suggestion (1980: 350 sqq.), based on his analysis of household composition, and the nature of the cycle of domestic development, is that brother-sister marriage was a way of controlling property exchanges and other claims attendant upon the in-marrying daughter-in-law. But this is basically still a variant of the economic argument alluded to above. As such, it is open to precisely the same (and, to me, decisive) objections. That is to say, there must have been at least one other true cause or decisive catalyst that led considerations of economic advantage to have had a type of impact in Egypt that they had nowhere else in the Mediterranean.

After having ruled out all these factors as sufficient explanations in themselves, one might well wish, like Hopkins, to profess a bald agnosticism on the subject. But I would like to proffer an alternative explanation – one which I think is concordant both with the available evidence and with the general historical developments in which Egyptian society was involved in the post-pharaonic period. The explanation is also specific to the very persons whose brother-sister marriages the census figures reveal. To pre-empt my argument, the explanation offered is rather simple. It was all a matter of race, or better, 'racism'. Expressed in somewhat more elaborate terms, I shall argue that these close-kin marriages were one response to the effects of what I would call the racial perceptions of the persons involved in them. If true, we would at least have an explanation that would require us neither to go back to the 'distant mists' of an Egyptian past nor to rely solely upon social and economic factors that should have been operating almost everywhere else in the Mediterranean world of the time. The factors I am going to claim as responsible for brother-sister marriages were ones specific not only to Egypt, but also to the precise social group involved in these marriages in the post-pharaonic period. Moreover, if such a secular explanation can be made to work for this case, it should shed a little more light on the general history of incest, and perhaps also on the problem of the supposed universality of certain aspects of human behaviour (or, as it is sometimes more grandly put, 'human nature').

The social location of Greek settlers in Egypt

We must begin our investigation by inquiring into the identities of the persons whose families and kinship relations are recorded in the census declarations from the Roman period. It is here that I must make my first serious break with one of Hopkins's claims, namely his assertion that 'the surviving census returns are probably representative of a wider Egyptian population' (1980: 304). I would argue that this is unlikely to be true, and that the recognition of the precise population involved in the brother-sister marriages is a most important first step towards a possible explanation. For one thing, the geographical distribution of the surviving census returns is hardly a random sample from all the nomes or administrative districts of Egypt (see table 2A, and fig. 1). A mere two or three nomes (out of some thirty-five to forty) account for almost all the currently known census

TABLE 2: Geographical and chronological distribution of census returns from Egypt of the Roman Period (N = 301).

A: Geographical distribution by administrative district [nome] (bracketed entries under nomes = some major town sites from that region)		
Nome	N =	% =
Apollonite	9	3.0
Arsinoite	177	58.8
[Arsinoë]	[81]	[26.9]
[Karanis]	[23]	[7.6]
[Soknopaïou Nesos]	[15]	[5.0]
[Tebtunis]	[13]	[4.3]
Herakleopolite	11	3.7
Hermopolite	10	3.3
Memphite	11	3.7
Oxyrhynchite	46	15.3
[Oxyrhynchus]	[39]	[13.0]
Prosopite	20	6.6
Others	11	3.7
Unknown	6	2.0
Note: One nome, the Arsinoite, has produced three-fifths of all known census returns; and another, the Oxyrhynchite, has produced another sixth. Therefore, only two administrative districts or nomes (out of c. 35-40) are the source locations of about three-quarters of all census documents recovered by modern scholarship. In fact, five town sites alone (Arsinoë, Karanis, Soknopaïou Nesos, Tebtunis and Oxyrhynchus) account for 171 or 57% of all known census documents.		
B: The chronological distribution of census returns		
Year (AD)	N =	% =
5/6	1	0.3
33/34	4	1.3
47/48	1	0.3
61/62	5	1.7
75/76	3	1.0
89/90	3	1.0
103/104	15	5.0
117/118	19	6.3
131/132	34	11.3
145/146	35	11.6
159/160	31	10.3
173/174	41	13.6
187/188	48	15.9
201/202	15	5.0
215/216	17	5.6
229/230	7	2.3
243/244	7	2.3
257/258	1	0.3
Unspec.	14	4.7

returns, and the location of these districts is most important to our analysis. The nomes that are by far the most heavily represented (the Arsinoite, Herakleopolite, Memphite and Oxyrhynchite) were also renowned as regions of heavy Greek colonial settlement following upon the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great. In fact, the single most heavily represented nome (the Arsinoite) is basically coterminous with the geographical region of the Faiyûm – a zone of planned intensive colonial development by the first Ptolemaic kings of Egypt (especially under Ptolemy Philadelphus II, to whose reign the foundation of the nome capital or *metropolis* of Arsinoë dates; see Crawford 1971: ch. 3). Therefore, both the geographical location of almost all the surviving data, and the nomenclature of the persons concerned, indicate beyond any reasonable doubt that they were not representative of 'Egyptians as a whole'. Rather they were direct descendants either of Greek settlers or of those Egyptians who were desperately trying to 'pass' as such persons and who are generally known as having had 'metropolitan' status because they identified themselves (by actual residence, or otherwise) with the urban-dwelling or urban-centred Greek settler inhabitants of Egypt. They lived in the 'mother cities' (*metropoleis*), or dependent settlements, that were the main loci of Hellenistic Greek settlement in the land of Egypt following on the conquest of the region by the Graeco-Macedonian armies of Alexander the Great in the late 330s B.C. In order to understand the peculiar situation of these settlers, and their probable social organization (especially as regards something as fundamental as marriage and family formation), it is necessary first to review their vested interests in coming to Egypt, and their ethnic relations with the indigenous Egyptian inhabitants of the land they were occupying and whose resources they were administering.

Without accepting too literally the concept of a 'marriage market', one can nonetheless envisage marriage as involving choices made, either by the spouses themselves, or by their parents (or families), or by both. The nature of the family group, and its values, is then of some importance in giving a context for these decisions. Both Hopkins (1980: 328-32) and Goody (1990: 337-8) have noted that the family groups of the specific Graeco-Egyptians involved in very close-kin marriages were themselves rather isolated. They seem to have been characterized by a relative absence of the larger, complex networks of kinship relations that were typical of Greek communities in 'old Greece'. Hopkins specifically notes that, in the absence of such larger kin groups, households were aggregated directly into the unit of the village which 'was quite steeply stratified and internally differentiated' (Hopkins 1980: 342). This seems a rather unusual condition if one compares these village-dwelling Greeks with those in similar circumstances in their Greek homeland, where larger kin-group connexions and obligations were the norm. The fragmented and relatively isolated nature of Greek households in Egypt is surely a symptom of their 'colonial' situation, their settler origins. It is most likely that those Greeks recorded in the Roman census returns, or, to be more precise, their ancestors, came as individual settlers or as isolated families to establish themselves in the new land. They had to depend on institutions other than naturally constructed kinship groups, on artificial status markers such as membership in their town, in the local gymnasium, in craft and other such associations, in order to form larger resource groups. These latter

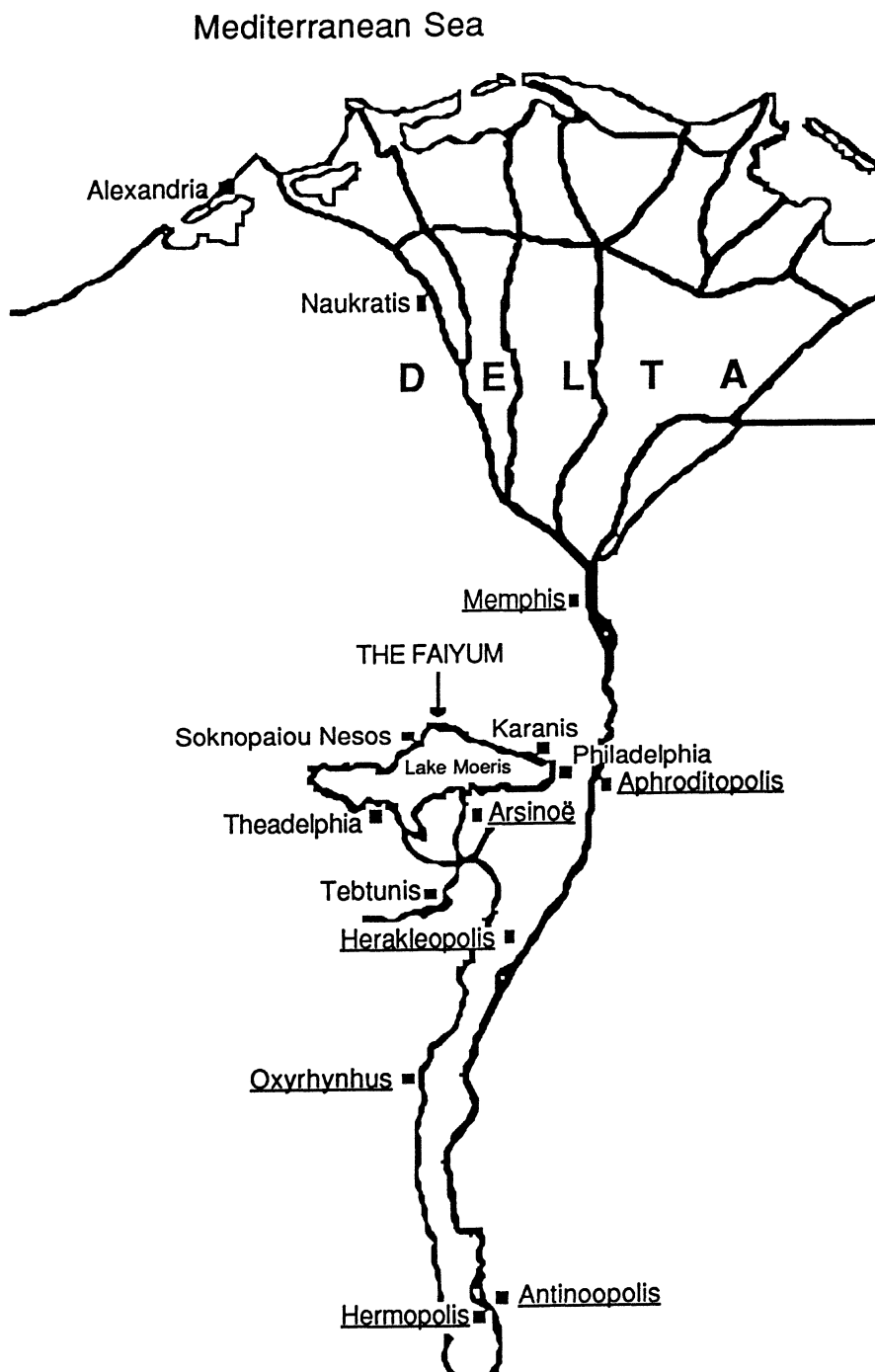


FIGURE 1. Major sites in Upper Egypt of the Roman Period, including the principal source locations of the census documents (nome capitals, or *metropoleis*, underlined).

associations served rather well as extensions of family interests, but they could not replace the family formation when it came to dealing with such critical matters as the devolution of property (especially, in the Nile valley and Faiyûm, where such property included highly productive irrigated land) and the manipulation of family wealth.

The Greek settlers' attitudes towards the indigenous Egyptians, whose land, property and wealth were the object of one of the greatest 'take-overs' in all of antiquity, amply justify Edouard Will's characterization of the situation as one of classic colonialism (Will 1985). The new networks of power instituted by the Graeco-Macedonian conquerors were marked by the deliberate exclusion of the native Egyptians from almost every level of formal state power, and from almost every ancillary area of life where the settler government controlled access to resources. Detailed studies of the different positions of governmental and formal economic power in Ptolemaic Egypt, including state high-priesthoods, officers of the Greek law-courts, gymnasiarchs, the heads of local municipal organizations and even athletes competing in formal games, yield the same uniformly negative picture: over the entire Ptolemaic period there is hardly a known example of an Egyptian being allowed into any of these positions (Clarysse 1985; Peremans 1962; 1970a; 1970b; 1973; 1974; 1975; 1976). The social separation between Greek settlers and locals was further marked by the clear distinction between 'country' and 'city' in the exploitation of Egypt. There was a very limited Greek settler presence in the countryside itself; most Greek colonists tended to congregate in urban centres, including the three genuine cities (all foreign establishments of theirs) of Alexandria, Naukratis and Ptolemaïs (see fig. 1). The domination of the countryside itself was managed through a network of 'false *poleis*' or Greek-type town settlements, each of them rather grandiosely labelled a 'mother city' (*metropoleis*), even if it was not much more than a 'hopped-up' village (*komê*), at the centre of each provincial administrative district or *nome*. The Greek settlers tended to converge on these urban centres, thus exacerbating the harsh opposition between the 'civilised' people of the 'cities' (i.e., themselves) and the native Egyptian 'inferiors' in the countryside (Bingen 1973; Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1983: 254).

The superior power wielded by the Greek rulers, combined with their demand that all formal and official acts be conducted in their language alone, enforced the clearest of separations between 'us' and 'them'. Given the fundamentally agrarian nature of the ancient economy, all this was in the service of the most important part of the great takeover: the seizure of all of the most fertile and most productive tracts of land in Egypt. All the known holders of the most extensive properties and the richest lands were now colonial Greeks. Native Egyptians were restricted to service as tied-peasants labouring on crown or temple lands, or as holders of small and marginal pieces of land (Peremans 1974 provides the statistics). In order to exclude this labouring Egyptian 'mass' from infiltration into the Greek networks of power, a number of extremely harsh segregation measures were put into place by the conquering administration. Amongst these measures, for example, was a rule forbidding indigenous Egyptians even to change their Egyptian names to Greek ones without formal permission of the government. Breach of this law carried the death penalty

(Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1983: 244-5; *Select Papyri*, 2.307 of A.D. 194). A simple thing such as identification by personal name (whether Greek or Egyptian) was of critical importance since the serried ranks of governmental and bureaucratic posts created by the occupying colonial régime were technically open only to 'Greeks'. Recognition of the hard facts of this stark economic exploitation, and the social and cultural norms systematically deployed in its direct support, has led scholars to move radically away from the rosy ideological view of Egypt as exemplifying the 'admirable' mix of Greek and local cultures called 'Hellenistic'. If anything, current historians generally subscribe to the opposite position, and view the situation as one of a conquering élite strictly segregated from a subject population on almost every plane, a segregation that was rigorously buttressed by cultural and linguistic norms, legal sanctions, and religious beliefs (Swiderek 1954; Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1980: 62-4; 1983; Préaux 1978; Thompson 1988; for the Roman period see Foraboschi 1988; Montevecchi 1985).

As a caution, however, one must concede that ethnicity was never solely a matter of names, and so nomenclature alone will never provide an unequivocal guide to ethnic identification. In addition to 'pure' Greek names sometimes assumed by Egyptians, there was a rather florid and modish 'Egyptianizing' style of names assumed by Greeks; in addition to which there was a prevalent system of dual naming (i.e., the same person bearing both an Egyptian and a Greek name, and using one or the other in different circumstances). The obscurities caused by the different possibilities in naming are sometimes so great as to bring into doubt the very existence of hard-and-fast ethnic frontiers in Egypt of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. The latest, though not the most sophisticated, attempt to question the link between naming and ethnic identification has been made by Goudriaan (1988). Basing his analysis on Barth's (1969) theory of ethnic boundary formation, he argues for a situation of considerable ethnic mobility and fluidity amongst all the inhabitants of Graeco-Roman Egypt.⁹ Since his analysis strikes at the heart of the position being argued here, two conclusions to which even he has been compelled perhaps bear repetition. First, he admits that 'as everyone knows, when the Romans re-organized Egypt, they availed themselves of the presence of a Hellenic population living mainly in the nome capitals and granted it the privilege of paying the poll tax at a reduced rate' (Goudriaan 1988: 14). Unlike Goudriaan, however, I am not as interested in the absolute benefit of slightly lower taxes, as in all the other political and economic advantages that such an official concession clearly signalled. Secondly, Goudriaan is forced to admit, in the face of unequivocal evidence that stands against his own theory, that ethnic identification decisively affected tribute status, and, with that, much else (Goudriaan 1988: 102-4). Given the fact that 'Greeks', however defined, constituted a tiny ethnic minority amidst a massive local population (Goudriaan 1988: 90), there can be little doubt that the deployment of ethnic identifiers (amongst which names were an important component) mattered greatly in determining control over, and access to, critical economic and bureaucratic resources.

It is therefore this position of Greek settlers in Egypt in the Hellenistic period after the conquest of the region by Alexander the Great and the imposition of settler rule under the Graeco-Macedonian dynasty of the Ptolemies (and during

the period of Roman rule following the conquest and absorption of Egypt by Octavian/Augustus from Cleopatra, the last of the Ptolemies, in 31 B.C.) that is the critical factor that must be taken into consideration. The evidence on their situation is almost unequivocal in revealing a society in which relations between the incoming conquerors and exploiters of the land, and the indigenous locals, were pervasively and ubiquitously determined by racist conceptions. The importance for the ruling élite of legitimating and protecting its massive seizure of wealth (unparalleled in the world of antiquity at the time it occurred) cannot be underestimated. That problem specifically faced the ruling family or *oikos* of Ptolemy, one of Alexander the Great's strongmen, who seized the land as his share of the massive pillaging expedition of the whole Near East staged by Macedonian armies in an unprecedentedly narrow span of time – 'unprecedented', that is, given the scale of the loot. As an important part of the maintenance of its hegemony over these acquisitions, within a generation the family of the Ptolemies took the Greek tendency to endogamy to its logical limits. In the mid-270s B.C. Ptolemy II married his full sister Arsinoë, who was then dubbed 'Philadelphos' or the 'Brother-Lover' (Kornemann 1923: 23–4n4).

Over the next two centuries or so, the very close in-marrying practices of the Ptolemaic family produced a remarkable series of publicly advertised and celebrated 'Brother-Lovers' and 'Sister-Lovers'. An elementary calculation can be offered on the matter. Of the fifteen or so marriages made by the male Graeco-Macedonian rulers of Egypt from Ptolemy II to the end of the dynasty, ten, and possibly eleven, were full brother-sister marriages.¹⁰ That is to say, at least two-thirds of all such marriages were fully incestuous. There is no comparable phenomenon known from the preceding pharaonic period. It must be further emphasized that the persons engaging in these acts were *not* indigenous Egyptians, but Graeco-Macedonians who clearly separated themselves, in almost every possible way, from the local inhabitants. They made it a point of pride to be known as 'Macedonians', and all of them also prided themselves on not knowing so much as a word of the local language (Cleopatra, the last of the dynasty, being the singular exception in this regard). The inception of the practice of brother-sister marriage at the pinnacle of the Ptolemaic family, where it is first most firmly documented, was therefore directly tied to the unusual colonial situation of the foreign ruling élite. Even amongst the settlers themselves, however, attitudes towards the practice, official and otherwise, were varied; to more than a few it was seen as a rather extreme measure of dubious 'moral' quality. Official poets in the pay of the dynasty, such as the Sicilian immigrant Greek Theokritos (*Idylls* 17.128sq.), could call upon divine parallels in Greek mythology (viz., Zeus and Hera) to legitimate the close-kin marriages. But the practice clearly broke the innermost boundary of marriage prohibitions normally maintained in Greek city-states (though, notably, not by the ruling élites of the rural, kinship-dominated societies of Macedonia, whence these families ultimately came).¹¹ That elicited more than a few nasty comments from other poets, such as Sotades, noted for his 'tactless frankness', who wrote of Ptolemy II's relations with his sister: 'You are thrusting your foul prick into that unholy hole' (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistai*, 14.621). Once his epigram became known, Sotades's reaction was to flee from Alexandria as soon as possible; the king's reaction was

to have Sotades pursued and arrested by his general Patroklos (near the distant Aegean island of Kaunos) and to have the miscreant placed in a leaden container and sunk into the oceanic depths. Both responses demonstrate how seriously the breaking of the incest barriers could still be taken. Norms were clearly perceived as being broken in the service of a more compelling goal (that is, as far as the Ptolemies and their Greek settler subjects were concerned).

Greeks and Egyptians in the Roman period

In the Roman imperial period, the time from which our surviving census returns come (see table 2B), the ‘racial context’ forged during the Greek conquest did not change appreciably. Egyptians were still the victims of distaste, hatred and maltreatment by virtue of the simple fact of their ethnicity. The Egyptians’ low status was, to a considerable extent, determined by the unusual degree of unity which an oriental-type state had forged in the Nile Valley in the pre-Roman era. In the pharaonic period the whole country had become the property of a single ruler at the pinnacle of a collage of temple properties and ‘noble houses’ that controlled the land. The final incorporation of Egypt into the Roman empire by Octavian in 31 B.C. therefore took the form of the narrowest of circulation of élites. Princesps replaced pharaoh. The land became the private preserve of the emperor, directly controlled by his personal agents. If the native Egyptians had already been stigmatized as inferior beings during three centuries of Graeco-Macedonian colonial rule, then their status was only further depressed by the addition of yet another level of foreign superiors (see table 3). Conquest and integration did not bring them the benefit of a partial restoration of civil status

TABLE 3. The ethnic divisions of Hellenistic-Roman Egypt.

ETHNIC GROUPS	MARRIAGE BARS	TRIBUTE STATUS
Roman citizens (administrators, soldiers)	↕	Tribute Free <i>ateleis - immunes</i>
Greek settlers (administrators, soldiers, farmers, businessmen, traders, artisans)		
Native Egyptians (farmers, priests)	↕	Totally Subject

that was conceded to most other provincial areas of the empire. Their situation was one of complete personal subordination, such that they have been likened to slaves or 'the utterly surrendered' (*dediticii*) in their near-total lack of civic status and inability to acquire basic rights on their own (Jones 1968; but see Sherwin-White 1973: 380-6). In theory there was no way for native Egyptians to advance directly to Roman citizenship; they were trapped in a hermetically sealed status compartment that allowed access to citizenship only through other intermediate chambers. The Roman administration of Egypt continued to enforce the old Greek settler norms of the Ptolemaic period, including legal injunctions against assuming Greek names and any other such attempts by locals to pass themselves off as non-Egyptians (Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1983: 244-5; *Gnomon of the Idios Logos*, § 42).

The fact that the small village dominated the rural society of upper Egypt (which continued to possess no true cities except for foreign establishments) led its indigenous inhabitants to be stigmatized as belonging to a world of rural 'barbarism'. Outsiders identified Egyptians with the rustic idiocy that was one of the hallmarks of 'barbarian' peoples beyond the frontiers of the empire. The lack of true urban centres meant, by extension, a singular absence of those visual signs of 'civilized' society – theatres, odeons, amphitheatres and circuses – that signalled architectural acceptability. Alexandria, the great urban centre of Egypt, was carefully segregated, ideologically and legally, from the rest of the country, almost as a separate community floating offshore. The city's precise name of 'Alexandria *beside* Egypt' reflected this status, as well as the more important fact that its citizens held a citizenship separate from, and absolutely superior to, that of the native Egyptians on the mainland (El-Abbadi 1962). The division is reflected in a decree issued by the emperor Caracalla in A.D. 215, in the aftermath of a bloody reprisal vented on the citizens of Alexandria who had presumed to question his divinity and his innocence in the matter of his brother's murder. The decree called for a wholesale expulsion of the idle and troublesome rural elements from the city, and anticipated no trouble in separating native Egyptians from Alexandrians. One finds in the emperor's words a racial segregation of the two groups, the outcast population being clearly marked by distinctive dress, mode of life, manners and language (*P. Giss.* 40.99.16-29 = *Select Papyri*, no. 215).

The whole ethnic group of Egyptians therefore found themselves stigmatized as outsiders in their own land. They suffered the brunt of personal and collective exploitation and maltreatment. And there was no way out of the trap. Egyptians could not acquire Roman citizenship except via the prior holding of Alexandrian citizenship, which was effectively withheld from them. What is more, Egyptians were kept recognizable. At birth, the native Egyptian was registered and had to keep his conspicuous Egyptian name; it could not be changed to a higher status Greek-sounding name without permission from the Roman authorities (Lewis 1983: 32; *Select Papyri*, no. 301). Most importantly for our considerations, a whole series of marriage bars, formally instituted in the law of the Roman emperor's Private Account (*Idios Logos*), made sure that Egyptians could only marry other Egyptians. (The so-called *Gnomon of the Idios Logos*, or the 'Rule of the Private Account' of the Roman emperor, was the basic fiscal

law-code issued by the chief finance officer of the province of Egypt. He acted on behalf of the Roman emperor who had replaced the pharaoh as the *de facto* owner of the whole land and its inhabitants.) If mixed marriages took place between an Egyptian and a higher status Greek or Roman, the children were cast down to the lower status of the Egyptian mother or father (*Gnomon of the Idios Logos*, § 38-9). The complex rules that governed the potential miscegenation of Egyptians with the other higher status ethnic groups that ruled Egypt in effect 'amounted to a veritable ancient apartheid' (Lewis 1983: 34). In other words, the formation of families was governed not only by social prejudices and racial antipathies, but also by formally legislated restrictions on who could marry whom.

Although all Egyptians were contemptuously lumped together by Greeks and Romans into the general category of *Aegyptius*, the lowly status of most Egyptians led members of the local and indigenous upper-classes to distance themselves from their more ordinary, polluted brethren and to strike a vicarious identification with local Greek-speaking élites. They achieved this principally by the deployment of a specific cultural code – in this case that of the Hellenistic settler classes. The distancing was further effected by the upper-class Egyptians' identification of themselves with the culture of the main urban centre in each province or 'nome', its so-called metropolis. The attitudes and behaviour of these particular Egyptians is adequately reflected in the words of one of them from Oxyrhynchus; after having been away from home for a year, he wrote back to his relatives: 'Perhaps, brothers, you think that I have become some sort of barbarian or an inhuman Egyptian' (*P.Oxy.* 1681 = *Select Papyri*, no. 152). However much 'metropolitan' Egyptians of pseudo-Greek descent attempted to distinguish themselves from other Egyptians, the Alexandrians and the Romans in Egypt tended to lump all the indigenous inhabitants of the land into the generally despised category of 'Egyptian'. When metropolitan officials, for example, tried to coerce malefactors who were of Alexandrian or Roman status, the act evoked a howl of anguished protest, of outrage that such higher status persons should have to suffer the indignity of being punished at the hands of despised Egyptians who served as the punishers and executioners (Lewis 1983: 23-4; *SB* 11114 = *Select Papyri*, no. 254, A.D. 153). Given the status of indigenous Egyptians in Egypt itself, a treatment which placed them in an extraordinary, if not unique, condition for a civil and nominally free provincial population of the empire, it can come as little surprise that Egyptians who went outside their homeland suffered greater stigmatization than either Greeks or 'Syrians'. In addition to experiencing the normal stigma attributed to immigrants in the large urban centres of the west, such as Rome, they also incurred a virulent hatred and distaste reserved for a polluted race. So, for example, a powerful member of the Jewish aristocracy of Alexandria could be further downgraded from his Jewishness by emphasizing his Egyptian background, by referring to him disparagingly as an *Aegyptius* and therefore one 'whose statue deserved not just to be pissed on' (Juvenal, *Satires*, 1.130; cf. 1.26). But, then again, Juvenal was only reflecting his own society's deeply ingrained disgust and hatred of Egyptians and their strange ways, especially their (to Greeks and Romans) bizarre religious beliefs and practices (Smelik & Hemlrijk 1972). These led on at least one occasion (in Juvenal's firm belief) to a 'documented case' of cannibalism, normally taken as one of the

surest proofs of depraved barbarity (Juvenal, *Satires*, 15). What else could one expect of them? In the years just after A.D. 200, when an educated Christian woman imagined the most degraded type of human to represent the quintessentially evil, a human surrogate for Satan himself, it was none other than 'a foul Egyptian' (*Passion of Perpetua*, 10).

The restriction of marriage choices in a settler society

When we speak of the marriage choices available to Greek settler elements in Egypt of the Roman period, therefore, the general social conditions in which they made those choices must not be forgotten. This 'colonial' Egyptian society was one fixed by extraordinarily rigid social hierarchies and one where there were, so to speak, 'black and white' lines to be drawn between the civilized 'us' and the degraded and barbaric 'them'. Given this social background, which I have just described in some detail, we might reconsider the range of choice of marriage partners attested in the census documents. First of all, I must make an obvious methodological rejoinder. We must not be led astray because of the fortuitous patterns of survival and recovery of the evidence. I think there can be no reasonable doubt that these marriage practices did *not* emerge suddenly, full-blown, in the Roman period. Everything indicates that they also typified Greek settler behaviour in the earlier Ptolemaic period. The only reason we suddenly acquire a picture of them is because of the peculiarities of the provincial census instituted by the Roman provincial government of Egypt, and the fact that those particular records have survived in some numbers (a fact clearly recognized by Thierfelder 1960: 90-6; the doubts expressed by Méléze-Modrzejewski 1964: 56-8 are not convincing). Given that we have no census returns of the highly rational and detailed Roman type from the Ptolemaic period, we are thrown back on other types of evidence. These clearly show that such practices did exist and were regarded as 'normal'. In 136 B.C., in making a query regarding his tribute status, a Greek immigrant banker from Tebtunis made clear reference to his wife who was also his sister (*P.Tebt.* 3.1, 766, lines 4-8; cited by Méléze-Modrzejewski 1964: 58-59). Though such notices are infrequent, that is simply in the nature of the surviving evidence. If the evidence of the detailed Roman census reports were to be removed from consideration, we would not be in a much better position to argue the case for the first three centuries A.D. – in fact, there would be very little hard evidence for the practice of brother-sister marriage during the Roman period (Montevecchi 1976: 83 makes the allied point that, but for these documents, we would in fact hardly know anything about the census itself).

What, then, was the situation as regards the choice of marriage partners actually like? For the Greek settlers who came to Egypt after its conquest by the armies of Alexander, and its foreign domination by the subsequent Graeco-Macedonian dynasty of the Ptolemies, it was a situation of both new-found freedoms and of new-found restrictions. The relative freedom lay in relation to the old environment of the Greek city-states or *poleis* they had left behind. The social structure of these cities was characterized by two broad marriage patterns. There was an archaic 'aristocratic' mode that both pre-dated the emergence of the full city-state, and also survived into its classical period. This was a pattern of

marriage in which 'nobles' or members of the urban élites were encouraged to marry 'outsiders' from other Greek cities, so long as they were of the same social class as themselves, in order to solidify their class interests and to extend their upper-class linkages. The classic marriage model of the developed city-state, however, and especially that of the democratic city-states, was inward-looking and restrictive. Law and custom dictated marriage to partners who were fellow-citizens, fellow members of the same *polis* (for some of the reasons behind these patterns see Méléze-Modrzejewski 1980: 53-4; see G. Herman 1987 for the 'aristocratic' norms). When Greek settlers went to Egypt, the evidence we have indicates that the old barriers between the city-states to which they had once belonged simply lapsed; they were no longer regarded to be of any particular significance. Persons of Greek background intermarried with no apparent prohibitions. In this sense, the 'New World' of Egypt freed the colonists from their old city-state inhibitions – it was more important for them, in their new colonial milieu, to be from a common Greek *ethnos*, than it was to maintain the old, petty city-state distinctions amongst themselves (Méléze-Modrzejewski 1980: 54-5). The basic reason for that breakdown of old distinctions was the new situation in which Greek settlers found themselves: an exiguously small governing élite, with privileged access to land and other economic resources. Set against them was a population of millions of indigenous Egyptians. It is precisely in such circumstances of isolation, even in recent states and societies where the possibility of 'getting out' has been much greater than under the cloying constrictions of the pre-modern economy and society of Graeco-Roman Egypt, that distinct immigrant ethnic groups have demonstrated extraordinary tendencies to endogamy, so much so as to be described as 'virtually caste-like' in their behaviour (see, for example, Pagnini & Morgan 1990, on the situation in New York at the turn of the century).

Though we can trace a few 'mixed marriages' between Greeks and Egyptians they are very rare, and occur mostly among certain special elements of local society and in special situations, such as frontier military posts where Greek soldiers occasionally married native Egyptian women. One of the best documented examples of just this sort of intermarriage is the second marriage of a Greek cavalry officer, one Dryton, in c. 150 B.C., to a native Egyptian girl known either by her Greek name, as Apollonia, or by her Egyptian one, as Senmouthis. But the known circumstances of this marriage only serve to emphasize its marginality (and probable rarity). First of all, the Greek officer Dryton had been transferred to an isolated frontier post on the southern borders of Egypt – to a small town, Pathyris, that was wholly indigenous (i.e., Egyptian) in its population, culture and language. Secondly, the girl's family, going back several generations, came from the same 'military' background as her prospective husband. Even given this convergence of background, and the compulsion of isolation, the marriage was only deemed possible because of the considerable steps taken by Apollonia-Senmouthis's family to make themselves 'look Greek' (e.g., by adding Greek-sounding names). Even so, the marriage must have been considered to be a strongly hypergamous one for Senmouthis, which made her agree, amongst other things, to marry a man 25-30 years older than herself (Méléze-Modrzejewski 1984; Lewis 1986: 91 sq.). But, it must be emphasized,

such situations were both rare and perceived to be highly abnormal. As Mélèze-Modrzejewski has rightly emphasized, even in the absence of formal juridical prohibitions, in Ptolemaic Egypt 'there arose a cultural barrier to intermarriage between the Greek-speaking immigrants and the indigenous Egyptian population. It was just another aspect of the gulf that separated the conquerors and the conquered' (1980: 64).

This situation continued basically unchanged in Egypt's transition from rule by the Ptolemies to integration (if that is the proper term) in the Roman empire by way of conquest by the first Roman emperor Augustus (from 31 B.C. onwards). If the situation changed at all, it was to the further disadvantage of the indigenous Egyptians, and for two reasons. First, a further (though very thin) layer of foreign domination was added to that of the existing Greek/Hellenistic rulers and administrators (see table 3). Though the number of Roman citizens who came to Egypt was never very great (they came principally as high-level administrators and soldiers in the legions stationed in the province), their presence and existence were nevertheless clearly demarcated both from the privileged Greek element in the local population and, of course, from the despised indigenous Egyptians. Secondly, the Roman empire operated with a far higher level of effective administrative rationality, especially as it concerned the imposition of uniform tax ('tribute') statuses on local provincial populations. These two elements, when added to a situation that was already riven by racial hatred and extraordinarily tense ethnic relations, only served further to exacerbate them.

A series of Roman legislative acts, especially the comprehensive revenue law for the whole province (the aforementioned 'Rule of the Private Account' of the Roman emperor) re-affirmed both the rigidity of ethnic boundaries and the old prohibitions on ethnic intermarriage. The law established three basic levels of tribute liability which corresponded, roughly, to the new tripartite ethnic or racial division in the land. Most privileged were those, generally Roman citizens, who were 'tribute exempt' (*ateleis* in Greek, *immunes* in Latin). Below these came persons who were subject to tribute payment, but who did so under certain ameliorative conditions, principally 'Greeks', or 'persons who were registered' (*epikekrimenoi*) as members of the local gymnasium or *metropolis*, and who were therefore officially registered as belonging to pure Greek 'blood lines'. In final place were the great mass of the inhabitants of Egypt, who were subject to the full rigour of the tribute (on all the above, see Wallace 1938 [1969]: chs. 7-8). In the first category were the offspring of marriages between full Roman citizens, or between a Roman citizen and a citizen of a local Greek town settlement in Egypt (*Gnomon of the Idios Logos* § 39, 46 & 52). In the second (and still privileged) category were offspring of marriages between citizens of Greek settlements in Egypt. In the last, most despised, category, were the offspring of 'mixed marriages', that is to say, between persons of 'Greek status' and native Egyptians. The former sort of 'mixed marriages' were possible, but were heavily discouraged by civil sanctions threatening the status of the children and by legal curbs on their rights of succession to their parents' property (§ 38, 46-50, 57).

The data we have bearing on brother-sister marriage in the Roman period, namely the census returns, must be set within this wider social context. But the census documents themselves are, alas, never going to give us the reasons for the

marital choices made by these people. Nor are any of the other types of evidence likely to yield any direct statements about personal motives. Therefore, the argument will have to hinge on what set of contingent circumstances might be adjudged to provide the most probable causal context. Hitherto most explanations have been rather 'inward looking', considering either isolated personal factors (e.g., modish preferences, religious beliefs) or internal family circumstances (e.g., family size, kin and personal relationships, family property). My argument is that a more persuasive answer can be provided by placing the Greek settler families in their broader social and political context.

In the situation of their *laagermentalität*, the broader range of marriage choices made by the Greek settlers is almost predictable. In all attested cases in the Ptolemaic period, there is negligible evidence of intermarriage between Greeks and native Egyptians. The few known cases all entail special circumstances, for example in which male Greek soldiers in isolated postings marry local Egyptian women. Not a single instance of a marriage of the reverse gender pattern (i.e., of an Egyptian male marrying a Greek female) has yet been uncovered (Peremans 1981). Apart from explicit evidence for intermarriage, we have the documentary evidence of nomenclature, of simple names. There are many problems with these data, but we shall accept the most optimistic scenario possible in order to highlight the extremes of possibilities suggested by them. There are about 20,000 named persons in documents from the Ptolemaic period. The question is: how many children in these bear two names, a Greek name and an Egyptian one (a customary practice, it might be argued, resulting from mixed marriages)?¹² And there are those cases where the father has an Egyptian name, but the son, in an attempt at upward mobility, has changed his to a Greek name, or indeed been given a Greek one at birth. The maximum numbers indicated are, again, negligibly small. For double-name cases the numbers are scant in the third century B.C., about 0.2 per cent. of all instances; the numbers are not much greater by the second century – about 0.5 per cent. (Peremans 1970: 218–19). Much the same can be said of father-son intergenerational name shifts: the proportion of names which indicate such a shift, in the total number of names, rises from about 0.3 to 3.0 per cent. over the last three centuries B.C.

Once we have considered these as maximum possibilities, however, it is only fair to add that almost all historians feel that these measurements (especially the latter), if read mechanically, would lead one to overestimate considerably the actual number of cases. All indices of *possible* intermarriage between Greeks and Egyptians, therefore, would indicate that from the very beginning (as the historical circumstances themselves would have otherwise suggested) the Greek settler element in Egypt successfully barricaded itself against permanent 'mixing' with indigenous Egyptians; they subscribed to a fortress-like mentality that clearly demarcated acceptable marriage partners (i.e., persons from the same ethnic and cultural background as themselves) from those who were, for all intents and purposes, *verboten* (i.e., the locals). This is *not* to argue that, *de facto*, persons did not cross these lines all the time – indigenous Egyptians tried 'to pass' as Greeks, some Greeks surrendered to the force of circumstances and married locals. The argument relates to the mentality, to perceptions of acceptability and unacceptability that would determine behaviour, including marriage arrangements. In their

new colonial surroundings the Greeks had already made one 'sacrifice', that is, to give up their old 'parochial' city-state marriage restrictions, and 'to agree' to a type of intermarriage that was atypical of their behaviour in the city-states of old Greece. The claustrophobic social world into which the Greek settlers had locked themselves would compel other such adjustments. It has been argued that it is precisely in such circumstances of severe isolation, of near-paranoic rejection of contacts with immediate neighbours, that the impelling conditions for incestuous relationships are to be found (Cohen 1978: 74-6).

The social pressures on Greek families in the era for which we have our best attested evidence of brother-sister marriages (i.e., the Roman period), as has been pointed out above, only increased. Greek parents had to be immensely concerned with maintaining their social status as 'Greeks', their 'metropolitan' condition (as was clearly seen by Hombert & Préaux 1949: 140). This could be done, on the one hand, by maintaining membership in settler clubs and associations, above all the 'social club' of the gymnasium, and by various forms of governmental registration. These measures could serve to meet the 'external' concerns of maintaining various formal privileges, such as tribute-status. But much more might be needed to meet the needs of maintaining family status in other terms: land, property and rank (with all its legal and other formal privileges). If the data that are the basis of Hopkins's study are re-evaluated for clues of this sort, one can say, at the very least, that they reveal precisely the sort of population among whose members the marital strategies with which we are concerned might be expected. The persons listed all come from the major Greek urban and governmental centres of the various provinces, or *nomes*, of Egypt. That is to say, they were all metropolitan Greeks of the most privileged status.

An analysis of their nomenclature confirms this. The names of the persons in the families involved in the brother-sister marriages are either wholly Greek, or, in certain instances, are 'invented' and innovative Graeco-Egyptian names assumed by Egyptians in order artificially to 'hellenize' their status. Typical of the latter are members of Egyptian priestly families who wished to preserve their special tax and land privileges as part of a local élite that had been willingly co-opted as part of the Graeco-Roman ruling order in Egypt.¹³ And in their census declarations the 'pure' Greeks display a great concern with their status, carefully noting links between parents and children; they are concerned to correct minute errors in nomenclature, and are equally careful to insist on their social status markers – especially in the case of males, that they were *apo tou gymnasiou*, among 'those from the gymnasium'. For example, there is the complaint lodged by one Aurelius Dionysius son of Diogenes from the 'polis' of Oxyrhynchus in A.D. 224-25: 'Since I have learned that my son Heras, mother Tauris, who is also my full sister, has been entered in the list of minors registered in the past second year in the category of thirteen-year-olds by a clerical error as "Heras, son of Diogenes, mother Tausiris, full sister of the father, twelve-drachma category, from the gymnasium". The entry ought to be "Heras, son of Diogenes alias Pausirion, grandson of Diogenes, mother Tauris, full sister of the father". I therefore submit this request' (*P. Oxy.* 43: 3096).¹⁴ Such concerns were maintained for years far beyond those for which the official census materials are preserved. For example, in A.D. 295 Aurelius Nilus, who had married his

half-sister Aurelia Artemidora, carefully registered his sons, noting that they too were of the twelve drachma category and were 'from the gymnasium' (*P.Oxy.* 43: 3137).¹⁵

The *epikrisis* ('judgement' or 'test') or procedure by which boys were registered as citizens of 'metropolitan status' and/or as members of the local gymnasium (and were henceforth known as 'the registered' or *epikekrimenoi*) was therefore a critical political *rite de passage*. It was, in fact, a severely formal test procedure in which the applicant had to prove his Greek blood descent on *both maternal and paternal sides* in order to be approved for admittance into the privileged ethnic-political class of Greeks in Egypt known as 'those from the metropolis'. A successful passage not only admitted him (and, subsequently, his family) to a class of privileged persons who were either partially or wholly exempt from the poll-tax, but also meant that he was an official part of the hellenized upper-class and was part of the social group of formally recognized 'acceptable' persons from whom most local (municipal) officials were selected. It is in this connexion that parents (or legal guardians) came to have an overwhelming concern with blood ancestry, with declarants tracing their Greek origins on both maternal and paternal sides for as far back as five or six generations.¹⁶ A succession of very-close kin marriages would, no doubt, be a very helpful strategy in maintaining these critical ethnic-political distinctions. That was, indeed, the conclusion arrived at by Hombert & Préaux some four decades ago (1952: 105): 'The hereditary and almost closed nature of their "class" amongst the citizens of the *metropoleis* explains the frequent practice of consanguineous marriages in the families of persons of metropolitan status'.

Conclusion

The case of the Egyptian colonial Greek settler class is a very specific and special one. Given the extreme social pressures dictated by their circumstances, we must see their decisions as to whom to marry as involving, on occasion, the question of just how close a kinsperson they would be willing to contemplate for the liaison. In a certain proportion of all cases (about one-sixth or so, according to our surviving data) we know that they were willing to collapse their traditional inhibitions against marriage between siblings. But we must show due caution. This is a very special case, with very specific historical roots and causes. The persons involved felt, on the one hand, compelled by ideological and material pressures; and, on the other, 'permitted' by certain precedents set in the ranks of their own local ruling class. It is therefore illegitimate (I would contend) to use this historical case, torn from its specific context (and with attention directed only to 'internal' causes) to support more general arguments about 'close-kin' marriage preferences in the 'Orient' as opposed to the 'West'.¹⁷ To recast Goody's words, I might define the 'incest taboo' not so much as some absolute, near-biological syndrome, but rather as what he has called an 'overriding tendency' (albeit a very strong one).¹⁸ What I have tried to do in this article is to bring the discussion of incest down from the transcendent heights of grand theory to the realm of the analysis of those 'contingent circumstances' that could in special cases (at least one of which is here documented for us in some detail) override the prevailing 'tendency' against very close-kin intermarriage and sexual intercourse. The

intense pressures of an economic nature (the massive rewards to be gained and maintained, amongst them very limited amounts of extraordinarily productive land), combined with and a colonial situation of a distinct ethnic ruling élite which continually defined itself in a very racist manner (via the hallmarks of a peculiar culture), were the main impelling forces. Indeed, these circumstances produced racial antipathies of the most violent and extreme sort ever attested for the world of Mediterranean antiquity. The peculiarly intense and claustrophobic social relationships generated in the isolated 'hot house' environment of the Nile Valley were conducive to a narrower range of pragmatic choices which led a minority (albeit a substantial one) of all Greek settlers in Egypt to override the inhibitions against normally 'incestuous' marriages and sexual relations. The option was made possible by the sense of almost 'royal' distinction that the Greek settlers arrogated to themselves, and by their close vertical linkages with their own dynastic rulers in Egypt (Mélèze-Modrzejewski 1983: 253). Those rulers, from a very early date, set a precedent by imitating the possibilities opened by their 'pharaonic predecessors', who on occasion had indeed practised brother-sister marriage. The option could then be mimicked by the Greek settlers in Egypt who, however rich or poor, weak or powerful they might have been, perceived themselves to be an integral part of the whole privileged Greek ruling 'class' in Egypt (and therefore in very close mental and moral proximity to the 'top' people at the upper end of that same social order). Certain types of 'incest' may well be seen as morally repellent, and might be 'proved' to be 'biologically disadvantageous'. But the behaviour is not part of an immutable 'law of nature'. In all its various degrees and varieties of manifestation, whether of indulgence or avoidance, it is still a part of human culture, and deserves, quite simply, to be explained.

NOTES

I should like to draw special attention to the generosity of Professor Keith Hopkins. On request, he readily made available to me the entire corpus of data he had used for his 1980 study. Such a sharing of resources, while a fundamental desideratum of the social sciences, is not always as readily forthcoming as the ideals of disinterested scholarship would dictate. I can only express my gratitude and note the model of his unhesitating co-operation.

¹ Goody himself notes: 'I implicitly accepted – like most anthropologists of that time and this – the universality of the incest taboo, by which was meant the prohibition of sexual intercourse between brother and sister, and between parents and children. [To Tylor, Freud, Parsons and Lévi-Strauss] the incest taboo was the basis of culture, the root of the moral order.' To this I can only add my own experience at a High Table conversation (Churchill College, Cambridge) when I described the Egyptian case, only to be faced with frank disbelief by R.G. Abrahams (and a couple of his anthropological colleagues). Such was their general faith in the 'law' of the 'incest taboo' that recourse was immediately sought by them in most of the standard objections (perhaps they really didn't mean *real* brothers and sisters' *vel sim.*).

² I must caution the reader that I am only drawing on, and briefly summarizing, some of the salient conclusions of Hopkins's article. His treatment is so full of lively description and provides such extensive and detailed quotation of the extant primary evidence that the reader is urged, if at all possible, to read his account first. My analysis will assume the broader evidence presented in Hopkins's account. His analysis forms my point of departure, and the fine details, fascinating as they are, will not be repeated *in extenso* here.

³ Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Kleitophon*, 1.3 (translation by John J. Winkler in Reardon 1989: 178).

⁴ Artemidorus, *Oneirokritica*, 5.24. The dream-interpretation book or *Oneirokritika* of Artemidorus has been widely recognized as a strikingly unusual piece of evidence for the social history of his time (the Greek city-states of the Roman empire of the second-century A.D. – therefore contemporary with the evidence provided by the Egyptian census returns). On Artemidorus in this context, see the extensive treatment by Foucault (1986). On the possible meanings of law/social custom/convention in this context see, especially, Winkler (1990: 33–41).

⁵ I have analyzed and taken into consideration an additional forty-one census documents published since Hopkins's study, but since the data in them have not fundamentally altered the basic proportions on which he based his analysis (cf. note 7), for the sake of continuity I have kept his statistical base as the foundation for my study. Where additional instances are employed, they are so designated.

⁶ Hopkins continues: 'Crude demographic calculation suggests that in the conditions of high mortality prevalent in Roman Egypt, only about 40 percent of all families had both a son and a daughter or both sons and daughters surviving to marriageable age'. He concludes from this that up to one third or even more of all brothers with marriageable sisters married inside the family in preference to marrying a woman from outside the family. I am not so sure that these two sets of data can be linked in this way. The census returns will provide us with a proportion of all recorded marriages that are in the brother-sister category. I do not think this proportion can then be linked retroactively to a putative reconstruction of the demographic profile of an Egyptian population. That is to say, the census returns give us proportions which eventuated from those given social circumstances, whatever they may have been. They cannot legitimately be 're-attached' to the putative numbers of 'daughters' or 'sons' available in families in order to produce a 'third order' statistic (in this case, yielding a much higher proportion of all marriages that were probably of the 'brother-sister' type). Whatever my doubts on this matter, however, I accept Hopkins's statistics as indicating that something in the order of 15 per cent. of all attested marriages in the census documents were of the full brother-sister type (i.e., about one-sixth of all attested marriages), and that this alone is more than sufficient to indicate the parameters of our problem.

⁷ On re-sorting the original data, I arrived at slightly different results: seventeen certain or relatively certain full brother-sister marriages, seven half-brother/half-sister marriages, and six cases that could be either (total N = 31). Brother-sister marriages of any type would then constitute about one-quarter of all marriages (on-going or not), and full brother-sister cases would account for about 16–17 per cent. or about one-sixth of all cases. The addition of census documents found since Hopkins's analysis would add, on my calculation, one full brother-sister case (*P.Oxy.* 43, 3096), and two half-brother/half-sister cases (*P.Petaus.* 1–2; *P.Strasb.* 768). Given the additional number of new marriages attested in these same documents, the proportion of brother-sister marriages of the total does not change appreciably.

⁸ On divorce, see, for example, the divorce contract/settlement of *P.Kron.* 52 (A.D. 138) for a full brother-sister marriage (in addition to Hopkins's data). It is absolutely standard in its division of property and the recognition of the rights granted to the divorcing spouses (both children of the same mother and father, the latter acting as the legal guardian or *kyrios* of his daughter, wife of his own son).

⁹ It should be noted, however, that Barth is virtually the only anthropological source on race and ethnicity that Goudriaan cites. Further, he does not seem to understand the nature of Barth's theory, nor that even if a case could be made for some mobility across racial/ethnic frontiers, that would still be no argument against either the firmly entrenched reality of such perceptions, or their considerable power in determining a considerable inequality in social relationships.

¹⁰ Using the standard reference sources, I could count eighteen known marriages from the inception of the dynasty. I have, however, discounted the three marriages of Ptolemy I, since it was only from Ptolemy II's actions that the pattern could be regarded as an 'established' and therefore acceptable one (and, on that basis, one might also be able to argue for ignoring his first marriage). There are some cautions: not all marriages might be known, and it is difficult to encompass some of the marriages of the female dynastic heads (especially Cleopatra VII). The point I am trying to make, however, is a general one, and at the level of generalization on which I am making it, the evidence clearly supports the conclusion.

¹¹ The tendencies were already evident before Arsinoë's marriage to her full-brother Philadelphus II; she had previously been married to her half-brother Ptolemy Keraunos. It was a

behaviour replicated in similar circumstances by isolated Graeco-Macedonian conquering ruling élites. There are, for example, two certain cases of full brother-sister marriage in the Hekatomid ruling dynasty that ruled over the successor kingdom of Caria, in southwest Anatolia, in the fourth century B.C. (see Hornblower [1982] – though I would reject his elaborate antiquarian search for ‘causal influences’).

¹² There are many methodological and other problems with this type of argument, on which see, amongst others, Peremans (1962; 1970*b*), the cautionary remarks in Crawford (1971: ch. 9), Méléze-Modrezejewski (1984: 366–70) and, especially, the hard counter-arguments in Clarysse (1985). But, as I have stated, I shall assume all such arrangements to be possible indications of mixed marriages in order to indicate to the reader the maximum possible number of instances suggested by the evidence. If there were many fewer such marriages, so much the worse for integration.

¹³ Typical of these would be the persons listed in the following census returns: PSI 1147; *Stud.Pal.* II, p. 30, col. iv; BGU 706; *P.Amh.* 74.

¹⁴ Additional to Hopkins’s data; the Tauris-Tausiris mistake made by the government scribe is one of the small errors that the complainant means to have corrected.

¹⁵ Additional to Hopkins’s data.

¹⁶ For a striking example, see *P.Mich.* 14, 676. In fact, it is often the case that notices of brother-sister marriages are to be found in such *epikrisis* documents, rather than in the census records. See, e.g., *P.Amh.* 75 (AD 161–68) in which at least three successive brother-sister marriages are documented on the father’s side of the declarant.

¹⁷ In saying this I am only rejecting this specific part of Goody’s argument, while tending to accept the general import of the rest – that is to say, in its more recent reworking (1990) as opposed to the earlier version (1983), on which see some of the reservations expressed by Shaw & Saller (1984).

¹⁸ I use the term ‘biological’ here in a somewhat muted sense to catch the distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ explanations of the phenomenon. I mean no more than that. For the distinction, as I understand it, see Lévi-Strauss (1969 [1949]: 8–10, 24), and the explication by Bischof (1975: 37–8).

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BGU = *Aegyptische Urkunden aus den [Königliche] Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: Griechische Urkunden, Berlin* (from 1895; vol. 13 by 1976)

Gnomon of the *Idios Logos* = W. Schubart ed., *Der Gnomon des Idios Logos, Berlin, 1919* = Vol. 5 of BGU (see above)

P.Mich. = *The Michigan Papyri*, various sources and editors, from 1931 (reaching vol. 13 by 1977)

P.Oxy. = B.P. Grenfell, A.S. Hunt *et al.* eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, London, from 1898 (vol. 57 by 1990)

P.Tebt. = B.P. Grenfell, A.S. Hunt, J.G. Smyly, E.J. Goodspeed, C.C. Edgar, J.G. Keenan & J.C. Shelton, eds., *The Tebtunis Papyri*, London, 1902–1976

SB = *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten*, begun by F. Preisigke in 1915, continued by F. Bilabel, E. Kiessling & H.A. Rupprecht (vol. 16 by 1987)

Select Papyri = A.S. Hunt & C.C. Edgar eds., *Select Papyri, Vol. 1: Non-Literary Papyri: Private Affairs; Vol. 2: Non-Literary Papyri: Public Documents*, London, Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1932 & 1934

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Expliquer l'inceste : les mariages entre frères et sœurs en Égypte à l'époque gréco-romaine

Résumé

Les unions incestueuses officiellement reconnues forment un domaine complexe mais potentiellement révélateur pour l'étude des relations humaines fondamentales. Il n'existe pourtant que peu de preuves irréfutables de ce phénomène. Ne serait-ce que pour cette raison, un cas particulièrement bien documenté comme celui de la société égyptienne au cours de l'époque gréco-romaine (300 av. J.-C. - 300 ap. J.-C.) offre un intérêt considérable. Pendant près de trois siècles,

un pourcentage élevé des mariages enregistrés par les recensements romains concerne des mariages entre frères et sœurs (réels). L'analyse de ces données, ainsi que du contexte socio-historique des personnes mentionnées, confirme l'hypothèse selon laquelle il a fallu des conditions exceptionnelles pour que ces personnes soient amenées à enfreindre les inhibitions 'naturelles' interdisant le mariage entre parents proches et les rapports sexuels. Les raisons invoquées sont tout à fait spécifiques à la situation sociale particulière de ces acteurs, et ne sont donc pas directement utilisables dans le débat concernant la variation des stratégies familiales et matrimoniales entre les régions orientales et occidentales du bassin méditerranéen.

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Curing Cut or Ritual Mutilation?

Some Remarks on the Practice of Female and Male Circumcision in Graeco-Roman Egypt

*By Mary Knight**

ABSTRACT

Ancient texts and archaeological artifacts provide the starting point for a review of the surgical aspects of female genital mutilation (FGM) in ancient Egypt. Analysis of the ancient surgical procedure incorporates modern experience on the subject as well as ancient literary and cultural perspectives. Comparison of FGM with ancient Egyptian male circumcision and consideration of motivations for the practice contribute to our understanding of FGM. In particular, the documented association between male circumcision and generative ability suggests a novel comparison with a natural process in the female—the breaking of the hymen on first intromission—and ultimately a new hypothesis for the origin of ancient FGM.

LONG VIEWED AS AN ANCIENT and exotically perplexing land, Egypt frequently harbored customs, notably those marked by gender, the opposite of Greek and Roman ones. Thus women were said to run the markets in Egypt while their men did the weaving; daughters were obliged to maintain their parents in old age while sons were absolved; and men were dedicated to the gods while women were not. Public, private, and religious customs were not the only ones identified as “upside down” by classical writers; personal, physical matters were also affected. Herodotus notes, for example, that Egyptian women urinated standing up, while their men squatted to perform the same act.¹ Some of these claims must surely be viewed with skepticism, particularly in light of archaeological and philological studies of Egyptian culture; yet one practice continues to be considered an

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¹ Herodotus, *Historiae*, 2.35. In 2.64 Herodotus remarks that sometimes Egyptians and Greeks together follow certain customs the opposite of those of the rest of the peoples of the world: e.g., Egyptians and Greeks both abstain from having sexual intercourse in temples, whereas everywhere else such sexual practices are a common feature of temple ritual.

aberrant ancient Egyptian custom, in part because of its persistence in Egypt to this day. That custom is excision of the clitoris and other external female genitalia, sometimes called female circumcision but now usually referred to in Egypt as female genital mutilation (FGM); the first extant literary mention of it is by the Greek geographer Strabo, who visited Egypt in about 25 B.C.E.: "This is one of the customs most zealously pursued by them [the Egyptians]: to raise every child that is born and to circumcise the males and excise the females."²

Modern commentators have frequently considered FGM in Egypt an ancient solution to venery—that is, excessive sexual desire and indulgence of sexual desire. The assumption that the custom was rooted in extinguishing female desire has found favor especially in the West, in part because a similar motivation is occasionally cited in Egypt today.³

Was FGM really practiced in antiquity as a preventative treatment for venery? Since FGM has long been considered an operation that mirrors male circumcision, were males likewise circumcised to prevent excessive sexual indulgence? This essay will first explore surgical aspects of FGM as revealed in ancient medical sources to determine who was operated on and why. Next, a comparison with male circumcision and consideration of studies of the modern practice of FGM in Egypt will highlight some of the various rationales for such surgical procedures, including the prevention of venery. Finally, a hypothesis for the origin of FGM will be proposed.

THE PROBLEMATIC NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

Before examining the ancient evidence, such as we have, for FGM, it is prudent to take into account the problematic nature of the evidence and interpretation of it as a whole. It is patently difficult to investigate conclusively surgical procedures conducted at a distance of more than two thousand years and in the absence of the living patients themselves. Significantly, we have no textual sources by women, only by men, although it must be granted that the medical sources as a rule "contain privileged information obtainable only from women [and] were directed at a female clientele," since a number of gynecology manuals are thought to have been written for midwives.⁴

A related issue is the discrepancy between how ancient male physicians and surgeons

² Strabo, *Geographika*, 17.2.5: καὶ τοῦτο δὲ τῶν μάλιστα ζηλουμένων παρ' αὐτοῖς τὸ πάντα τρέφειν τὰ γεννώμενα παῖδια καὶ τὸ περιτέμνειν καὶ τὰ θήλεα ἐκτέμνειν. In Egypt today the procedure is more commonly characterized as a mutilation (*batr*, lit. "mutilation" or "amputation") than as a purification (*Tahaara*), because there is general agreement that removal of an organ (as opposed to purely cutaneous tissue) constitutes a mutilation and that most instances of *khitaan al-binaat* ("female circumcision") in fact involve removal of the clitoris—not mere cutaneous tissue.

³ In a 1997 survey of fourteen thousand Egyptian women, 9.1 percent of respondents said that FGM preserves a girl's chastity, yet it is an assumption that this preservation results from a decrease in desire. For the results see Muhammad Fayyad, *Al-batr al-tanāsuli li-l-inath* (Cairo: Dar al-Shurūq, 1998), p. 146. Popular writers on ancient Egypt in particular tend toward simplistic analyses of FGM—see, e.g., Joyce Tyldesley, *Daughters of Isis: Women of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Penguin, 1994), p. 289 and n. 2 (cf. her comments on p. 150); and Dominic Montserrat, *Sex and Society in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (New York: Kegan Paul, 1996), pp. 42–44—but their works, because they are accessible to nonspecialists, are frequently consulted by researchers interested in the modern situation.

⁴ Leslie Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), p. 27. See also the discussion of the female *medica* and midwives in Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 67–70. On the absence of sources by women see *ibid.*, pp. 64–66; and Helen King, "Bound to Bleed: Artemis and Greek Women," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Avril Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 109–127, esp. pp. 109–110. King explores the implications of this biased recording of women's bodies and diseases in *Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

viewed the female body and how women viewed their own bodies—how they understood the functioning of their own parts, as it were. Yet even if we had clear-cut evidence of ancient Greek women's understanding of their bodies, we would still be hard pressed to apply this view wholesale to Graeco-Egyptian female groups throughout the centuries during which Greek was the language of the ruling classes. Not only were Greeks and Egyptians living largely separate lives, but Greeks in major cities such as Alexandria and Ptolemais may have differed significantly, both materially and culturally, from their cousins in smaller cities and in villages.

Equally problematic is the issue of Greek inheritance of FGM as a custom from the Egyptians. We note that Strabo considers the practice a distinctively Egyptian one. (He attributes it to the Jews of Judaea as well—but, notably, he considers them Egyptians.⁵) Did Greeks in Egypt practice FGM, and, if so, were there cultural pressures for accepting it either as a surgical procedure or as a custom akin to circumcision? As we shall soon see, the paucity of evidence, even by male writers, raises more questions than it answers.

Cultural bias—both ancient and modern—is another element that further complicates our reading of the past. This element cannot be satisfactorily evaluated without a reasonable estimate of the extent to which Greeks embraced the practice of FGM. The fact that the extant surgical descriptions do not appear in any language familiar to Egyptian audiences until after the Islamic conquest is telling in this regard, although precisely what it tells us is similarly problematic: assuming that there were no surgical descriptions in the Egyptian literature—a reckless assumption, to be sure—it could be that only the ruling Greek and Roman classes engaged surgeons or others properly trained to perform the procedure, while Egyptians resorted to folk practitioners trained orally and by experience or to individuals invested with the duty of ritual tradition.

More darkly, it is possible that Greek and Roman writers were biased against Egyptians as βάρβαροι (“foreigners”); inclusion of FGM in their manuals could thus be construed as a fetishizing of the colonized, but only if the Greeks in Egypt themselves did not embrace the practice.⁶ There is some evidence that, just as the female was viewed as “different” from the male, the woman of Egypt may have been considered “different” from her counterpart in Greece or Rome.

Women in Greece were thought to be predisposed to hysteria, one cause of which was a lack of sexual intercourse and of interest in it; treatment for the condition frequently involved fumigations.⁷ By contrast, women in Egypt were renowned for their sexual proclivities, and, thus, excision and other forms of FGM may have been conceived by male Greek medical authorities as primitive Egyptian solutions to an Egyptian problem.⁸ Cer-

⁵ In 16.2.37 Strabo describes circumcisions and excisions as δεισιδαιμονία (“superstitions”) of Jews who had forgotten the pious religion of Moses; in 16.2.34 and 17.2.5 he considers the Jews a tribe of Egyptians. His source for these passages and another that refers to the practice of male circumcision among people bordering the Red Sea (16.4.17) appears to be Artemidoros (cf. 16.4.16, 19), who lived in the late second and early first centuries B.C.E. Strabo did not visit the Red Sea coast or Judaea, although he spent several years in Egypt.

⁶ The hypothesis about bias against foreigners should not be dismissed lightly, given that a number of Egyptian and Arab intellectuals today express such opinions when reviewing the ancient testimony. Another opinion commonly heard is that since the evidence is in Greek and not in Egyptian, only the Greeks were practicing FGM. The custom is then seen as another degenerate colonialist import.

⁷ Hippocrates, *Gynaikeia*, 1.7. Lesley Dean-Jones, “The Politics of Pleasure: Female Sexual Appetite in the Hippocratic Corpus,” *Helios*, 1992, 19:72–91, esp. p. 79 f., comments on the practical and political implications of the Hippocratic model of female sexual appetite as described in this passage. See also Helen King's comments on the ambiguities surrounding hysteria in *Hippocrates' Woman* (cit. n. 4), pp. 212–222.

⁸ Strabo, 17.1.16, refers to the wantonness (λαμπρία) of the women and men who engaged in sexual escapades at Canobus in Egypt. The activity had become proverbial, being dubbed the “Canobic life” (Κανωβισμός). See also Montserrat, *Sex and Society in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (cit. n. 3), pp. 106–135, on the sex industry in Egypt.

tainly, the licentiousness of Egypt was a *topos* contrasted, especially in Augustus's propaganda, with Roman virtue and modesty; the country was depicted as morally loose, its last queen (actually a Macedonian Greek) as an Aphrodite who seduced a drunken Dionysos.⁹ Yet there is no explicit differentiation of the Greek/Roman woman from the non-Greek/Roman woman in the medical literature, and it appears that ordinary Egyptians and Greeks in Egypt may have valued female modesty as much as their Roman counterparts.¹⁰

The rhetorical and fetishizing character of many of the Greek and Latin works on foreign customs is itself filtered by modern interpreters through yet another layer of cultural bias. In the case of FGM, how much of the classical tradition a reader may be willing to reject out of hand as mere rhetoric may correlate with how willing he or she is to consider ancient Egyptians "different" from their Arabized descendants, especially when the topic in question is unpleasant, shameful, or culturally unacceptable by the reader's standards.

There is still another problem posed by the evidence that ties in with cultural bias, and this problem forces us to focus on the very root of our word "medicine" (the art of healing or curing). We tend to frame our understanding of the medical procedures of another culture with the medical standards of our own culture or society, and this essay will be no exception: modern Egyptian medical standards uniformly consider the ritual excision (literally, cutting out) of the clitoris as harming rather than healing the patient because the clitoris is an organ and not superfluous tissue.¹¹

Likewise, modern Egyptian medical standards suggest the use of various terms, including "female genital mutilation." As background, it may be helpful for readers to note that FGM, although a widespread practice throughout sub-Saharan Africa and Egypt today, is not universally the same operation. (See Figure 1.) Rather, there are several recognizable "degrees" of mutilation, with the preferred choice depending on local custom.¹² Some authorities accept the mere pricking of the clitoris with a needle as a true circumcision,

⁹ Plutarch, *Antonius*, 26. The topic has become a standard reference point for understanding the early Augustan period. See also Peter Green, *Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1990), p. 678 f.; Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: Univ. Michigan Press, 1990), pp. 57–65; and Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken, 1975), p. 188.

¹⁰ That young women should remain virgins before marriage seems to have been the rule—see Montserrat, *Sex and Society in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (cit. n. 3), p. 87—though less is known about the sex life of native Egyptian than of Graeco-Egyptian women, who are frequently represented in the literature and papyri and on archaeological artifacts. For references on modesty in Roman life see Elaine Fantham *et al.*, *Women in the Classical World* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 295–306; and Paul Zanker, *ibid.*, pp. 156–166. See also Jody Rubin Pinault, "The Medical Case for Virginité in the Early Second Century C.E.: Soranus of Ephesus, *Gynecology* 1.32," *Helios*, 1992, 19:123–139, on the emergence in the imperial period of lifelong virginity as a healthy goal.

¹¹ One survey of doctors found that 98.5 percent opposed the circumcision of girls; the remaining 1.5 percent, although they claimed to accept the practice, would not perform the operation on their own daughters: Fayyad, *Al-batr al-tanāsuli li-l-inath* (cit. n. 3), p. 152.

¹² On the extent of the practice of FGM see Fran P. Hosken, *The Hosken Report*, 4th rev. ed. (Lexington, Mass.: Women's International Network News, 1993), p. 13. Classification schemes vary among authorities; see the discussion in Mahmoud Karim, *Female Genital Mutilation (Circumcision): Historical, Social, Religious, Sexual, and Legal Aspects* (Cairo: National Population Council, 1998), pp. 26–34. See also Nahid Toubia, "Female Circumcision as a Public Health Issue," *New England Journal of Medicine*, 1994, 331:712–716; Otto Meinardus, "Mythological, Historical, and Sociological Aspects of the Practice of Female Circumcision among the Egyptians," *Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 1969, 16:387–397; and A. Huber, "Die weibliche Beschneidung," *Zeitschrift für Tropenmedizin und Parasitologie*, 1969, 20(1):1–9. Surgical techniques and complications of the modern procedure are outlined in Karim, *Circumcisions and Mutilations, Male and Female: Medical Aspects* (Cairo: Dar el-Ma'aref, 1995), pp. 45–66; see also Ahmed Abu-el-Futuh Shandall, "Circumcision and Infibulation of Females: A General Consideration of the Problem and a Clinical Study of the Complications in Sudanese Women," *Sudanese Medical Journal*, 1967, 5(4):178–212, for a complete review of FGM, including surgical aspects, in Sudan.

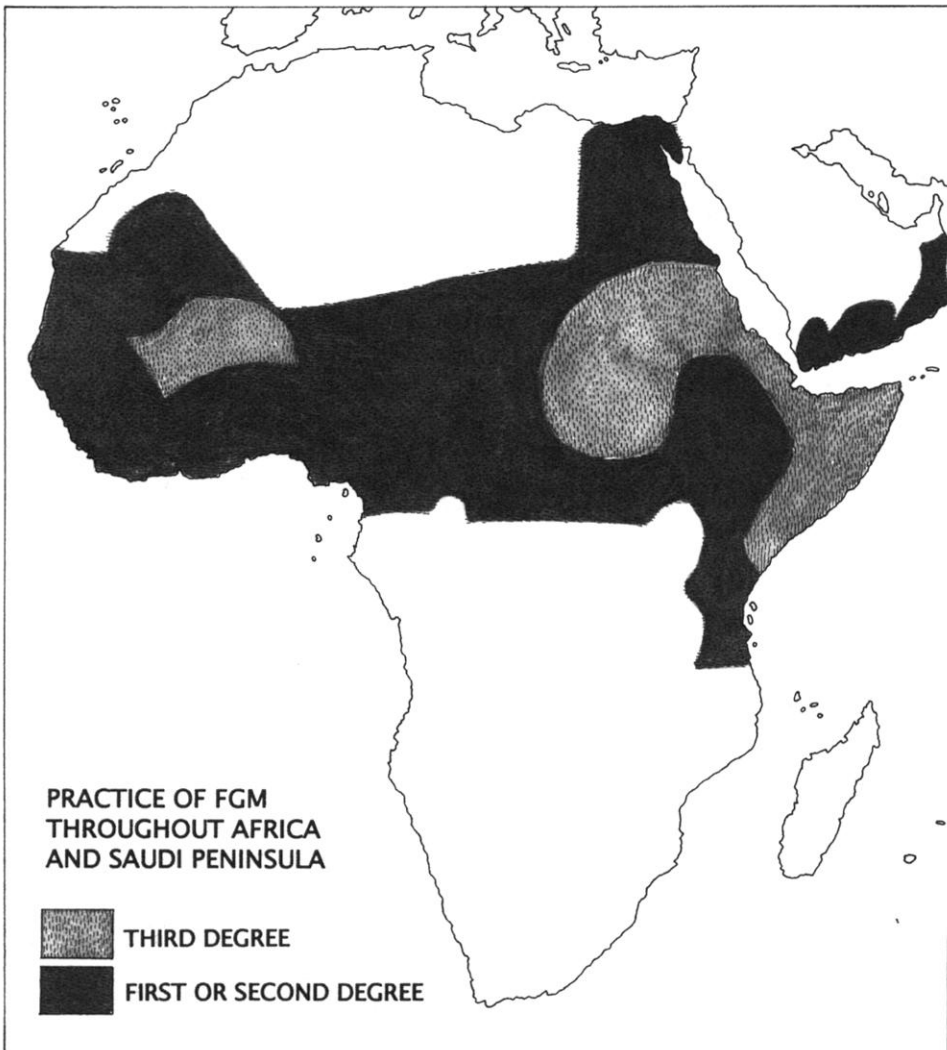


Figure 1. FGM is still commonly practiced in many parts of Africa and in the south of the Arabian Peninsula; significantly, it is not practiced in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In Egypt, first- or second-degree circumcisions are the norm for those girls who are circumcised; third-degree circumcision in Egypt is rare. (Illustration by Patricia J. Wynne.)

although it causes no permanent damage or disfigurement if performed correctly; the appearance is then of intact female genitalia. Leaving this type aside, the mildest form of FGM usually recognized as such involves removal of the hood of the clitoris only, the labia minora only, or both the hood of the clitoris and the labia minora. The second-degree form entails the removal of the entire clitoris and usually portions of the labia minora; it is the removal of the clitoris that characterizes this second degree as more radical than the first, since the clitoris is an organ and not merely skin, like the labia or the hood of the clitoris. In the most radical form of FGM, called infibulation, the clitoris, labia minora, and portions of the labia majora are all excised; in addition, the genital area is sutured shut

with thread or, often, with thorns, leaving only a tiny orifice for urinary and menstrual flows. (See Figure 2.) This last type of FGM is relatively rare in Egypt today but not unknown, being found primarily in the far south, where it is dubbed "Sudanese circumcision."¹³

THE MEDICAL SOURCES: THE SORANUS "FAMILY"

One question that arises from a review of the modern clinical classifications of FGM in Egypt today is whether similar distinctions were apparent in antiquity. Did ancient operators consciously choose what parts of the anatomy would be excised and were there distinctive degrees of mutilation? As we shall see, ancient evidence of the surgical procedure in fact demonstrates a clear understanding of certain components of female anatomy, in particular a distinction between the clitoral organ and nearby tissue. Notably, there is no extant description of infibulation, the most radical form of FGM.

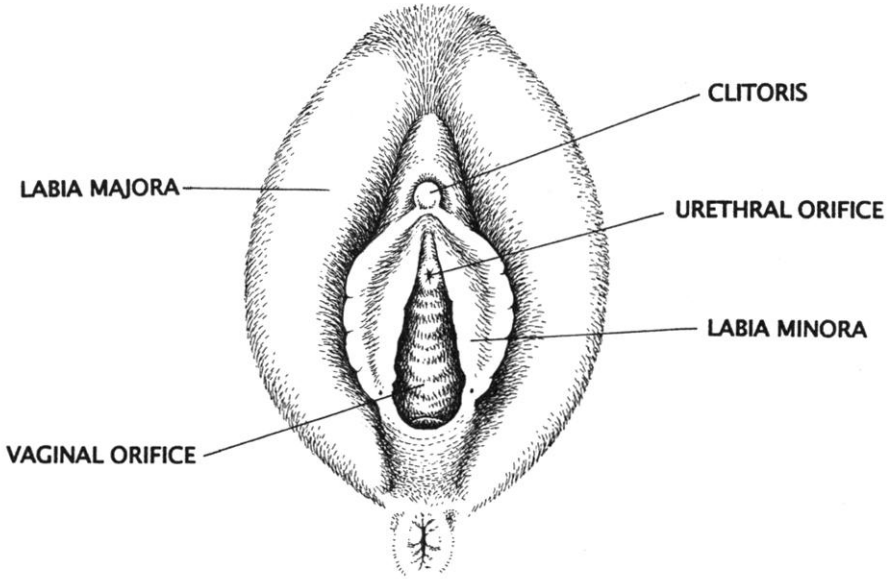
One of the earliest extant notices of the procedure is but a rubric, or chapter title, Περὶ ὑπερμεγέθους νύμφης ("On an excessively large clitoris"), from the *Gynecology* of Soranus, a second-century C.E. physician. It is important to note that the original Greek text of this chapter, with Soranus's own words, has not survived, nor is there any reference to excision of the clitoris or any other form of FGM in his extant works. Confusion on this issue occasionally arises for modern investigators of FGM because of a certain Muschio or Mustio, probably of the sixth century, who translated Soranus's work into Latin; Muschio's work apparently gained currency at least by the ninth century, and, in addition, a poor, very late retranslation into Greek was made. This work, notwithstanding the fact that the words are not Soranus's own, gives a fair indication of what his account actually was. Section 2.25 says:

On the excessively large clitoris, which the Greeks call the "masculinized" [reading "yos" as a Latinized ὕψ/ὕαξ, the god of fertilizing moisture] nymphe [clitoris]. The presenting feature [σύνπτωμα] of the deformity is a large masculinized clitoris. Indeed, some assert that its flesh becomes erect just as in men and as if in search of frequent sexual intercourse. You will remedy it in the following way: With the woman in a supine position, spreading the closed legs, it is necessary to hold [the clitoris] with a forceps turned to the outside so that the excess can be seen, and to cut off the tip with a scalpel, and finally, with appropriate diligence, to care for the resulting wound.¹⁴

¹³ Interestingly, in Sudan infibulation is referred to as "Pharaonic circumcision": see H. M. Hathout, "Some Aspects of Female Circumcision with Case Report of a Rare Complication," *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the British Commonwealth*, 1963, 70:505–507; and Shandall, "Circumcision and Infibulation of Females," (cit. n. 12) p. 179. Shandall's article thoroughly reviews the practice in Sudan, although it is now somewhat outdated. See also Allan Worsley, "Infibulation and Female Circumcision: A Study of a Little-Known Custom," *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the British Empire*, 1938, 45:686–691; and Hanny Lightfoot-Klein, *Prisoners of Ritual: An Odyssey into Female Genital Circumcision in Africa* (New York: Hanworth, 1989).

¹⁴ Soranus, *Gynaikeia*, 4.9 (370), in *Sorani Gynaeciorum libri IV*, ed. Johannes Ilberg (Corpus Medicorum Graecorum, 4) (Leipzig: Teubner, 1927), p. 147 (chapter title). For Muschio's Latin version see *Sorani Gynaeciorum vetus translatio latina*, ed. Valentin Rose (Leipzig: Teubner, 1882): "De inmoderata landica, quam Graeci yos nymphin appellant. (76) Turpitudinis symptoma est grandis yos nymfe. quidam vero adseverant pulpam ipsam erigi similiter ut viris et quasi usum coitus quaerere. curabis autem eam sic. supinam iactantes pedibus clusis myzo quod foris est et amplius esse videtur, tenere oportet et scalpello praecidere, deinde competenti diligentia vulnus ipsum curare." This Latin translation became the most frequently used source for translations of Soranus into modern languages; see the Budé text of Soranus: *Maladie des femmes*, trans. and commentary by Paul Burguière, Danielle Gourevitch, and Yves Malinas (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1988–1994), Vol. 1, pp. xlix–1. For an example of modern confusion regarding Soranus's work see Hosken, *Hosken Report* (cit. n. 12), p. 7.

EXTERNAL FEMALE GENITALIA



DEGREES OF MUTILATION

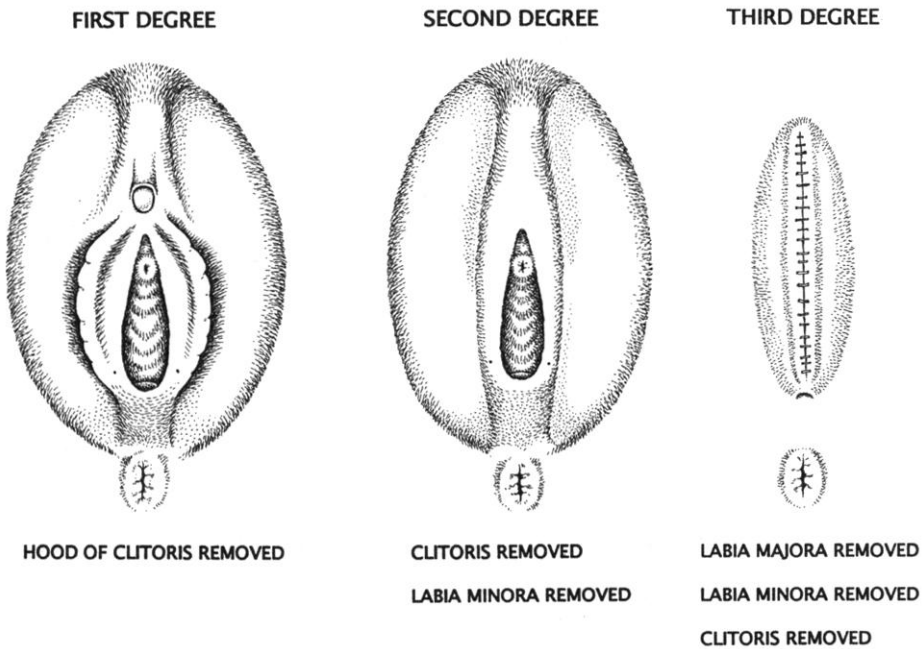


Figure 2. Intact external female genitalia (top) are contrasted with the three most common degrees of mutilation (bottom). There is no evidence that third-degree circumcisions were practiced in ancient Egypt, and even today this form is rare. (Illustration by Patricia J. Wynne.)

A better perspective on Soranus's original account may be taken from the *Gynaecia* of Caelius Aurelius, a fifth-century C.E. physician from Sicca Veneria (modern el-Kef in Tunisia) who synthesized much of Soranus's work. In a chapter entitled "De immodica landica" ("On an excessively large clitoris"), he wrote,

A dreadful size attends to certain clitorides and it upsets the women with the ugliness of the parts, and, as many relate, when it is affected by immoderate tumescence, these women acquire an appetite like men, and when [the clitoris] is so driven, they come into venery. The woman is placed in a supine position with her thighs slightly together so they do not have recourse to too much of the space of the female cavity. Then the superfluous amount should be held with a forceps and an appropriate amount cut off with the scalpel. For if it is stretched out to its greatest length, ** may follow, and it may cause hurt to the patient with a very large discharge from the cutting off. But after surgery, a remedy that keeps [the wound] under control and [that] ** should be applied.¹⁵

Rounding out perspectives on Soranus's original account is a medieval Arabic description of the operation, by the eleventh-century physician al-Zahrawi, which is thought also to derive from Soranus:

The clitoris may grow in size above the order of nature so that it gets a horrible deformed appearance; in some women it becomes erect like the male organ and attains to coitus. You must grasp the growth with your hand or a hook and cut it off. Do not cut too deeply, especially at the root of the growth, lest hemorrhage occur. Then apply the usual dressing for wounds until it is healed.¹⁶

This excerpt by al-Zahrawi is intriguing not only because it underscores how popular Soranus's work must have been, but also because it is the earliest extant account of the

¹⁵ Caelius Aurelius, *Gynaecia*, 2.112: "Quibusdam landicis horrida comitatur magnitudo et feminas partium feditate confundit et, ut plerique memorant, ipse adfecte tentigine virorum similem appetentiam sumant et in venerem coacte veniunt. supina denique mulier locanda est conductis femoribus, ne febre sinus distantiam sumant. tunc [in] midio est tenenda superflua atque pro modo alienitatis sue scalpello precidenda. si enim plurimum extenditur porrecta longitudine sequetur ** atque ita inmodice decisionis largo fluore afficit patientem. set post chirurgiam erit adhibenda coercens atque ** curatio." The most accessible edition of this work is Caelius Aurelianus *Gynaecia: Fragments of a Latin Version of Soranus' Gynaecia from a Thirteenth-Century Manuscript*, ed. Miriam F. Drabkin and Israel E. Drabkin, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (Suppl. 13), 1951 (see p. 113).

¹⁶ Al-Zahrawi (often called Abu al-Qasim or Abucasis in the West), *Surgery*, 2.71:

البظر ربما زاد في القدر علي الأمر الطبيعى حتي يسمح
ويقبح منظره وقد يعظم في بعض النساء حتي ينتشر مثل
الرجال ويصير الي الجماع، فينبغي أن تمسك فضل البظر
بيدك أو بصنارة وتقطعه ولا تمعن في القطع ولا سيما في عمق
الأصل لئلا يعرض نزف دم ثم تعالجه بعلاج الجراحات حتي يبرأ

Text and translation in Abucasis *On Surgery and Instruments: A Definitive Edition of the Arabic Text with English Translation and Commentary*, ed. and trans. M. S. Spink and G. L. Lewis (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1973), p. 456 f. For al-Zahrawi's reliance on Greek sources see Sami Khalaf Hamarneh and Glenn Sonnedecker, *A Pharmaceutical View of Abulcasis al-Zahrāwī in Moorish Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), p. 54.

procedure in Arabic and the first time a description of the operation would have been accessible, to one degree or another, to the native population of Egypt.¹⁷

In the extant work of Soranus there is a discussion of cutting away a *ὕμην*, or membrane, that obstructed vaginal flows, but this was not a form of FGM. A close reading clarifies that the operation he recommends is indicated in girls not involved in exercise who still do not menstruate. "As for those who on account of some disease do not menstruate, one must treat them according to the disease that has caused the suppression of the menses. In those who lack a vaginal opening, cut around the membrane or flesh, soften and adjust the shape of the callous overgrowth, relieve the inflammation by gentle means, reduce as much as possible the scarred-over wound, relieve [undesirable] closures or deviations." The condition is caused, most commonly, by an imperforate hymen or labial adhesions or, less commonly, by genetic defects that result in the lack of a vaginal opening. In such cases, as Soranus indicates, one should cut away the obstructing membrane—Greek *ὕμην*, not equivalent to the structure known in English as the hymen—and cosmetically repair the area.¹⁸

Paul of Aegina, a seventh-century physician of Alexandria, is known to have borrowed heavily from Galen and Oribasius for his seven-book *Epitomê Iatrikê*, of which Book 6 is devoted to more than 120 surgical operations; it is more likely, however, that Soranus was the source for his discussion of surgery for an excessively large clitoris. This conclusion is based on the fact that the description accords in most of its particulars with those passages already cited whose lineage to Soranus is more firmly authenticated. Paul states:

An immense clitoris occurs in some women, becoming a shameful ugliness, such that there are reports that some of the women have erections of this part just like men and eagerly desire sexual intercourse. Thus, with the woman in a supine position, we take hold of the excess of the clitoris with a small forceps and cut it off with a surgeon's knife, while guarding against cutting too deeply so that a *rhyadikos* state [urinary fistula] does not develop from it.

The Soranus family of medical reports all highlight the excessively large clitorides of affected patients as well as the shamefulness that resulted from erections and the desire for sexual indulgence that attended such physical, but natural, deformities.¹⁹ The placement

¹⁷ It should be noted that female circumcision is not an Islamic religious practice and that it is not practiced by the Arabs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The primary support for it as Islamic derives from a *hadith* (report of the Prophet's sayings) that was considered unreliable by the collector, Abu Dawud. It is found in his *Kitaab al-sunan* (Jidda: Dar al-Qibla li-l-Thaqaafa al-Islamiya, 1998), Vol. 5, section on *adab*, no. 182, no. 5229, p. 456. See also the discussion on the Islamic sources in Fayyad, *Al-batr al-tanāsuli li-l-inath* (cit. n. 3), pp. 109–117.

¹⁸ Soranus, *Gynae.*, 3.2b.9 (Ilberg ed. [cit. n. 14]): Τὰς δὲ διὰ τι πάθος μὴ καθαιπρουμένας ἀκολούθως τῷ πεποιηκότι πάθει τὴν ἐποχὴν τῶν ἐμμήνων θεραπευτέον, περκόπτοντα μὲν τὸν ὑμένα ἢ τὴν σάρκα ἐπὶ τῶν ἀτρήτων, μαλάσσοντα δὲ καὶ μετασυγκρίνοντα τὴν περιτόλῳσιν καὶ τὸν σκῖρον, χαλῶντα δὲ παρηγορικῶς τὴν φλεγμονήν, λεπτύνοντα δὲ ὡς ἔστιν τὴν οὐλήν, ἀνιέντα δὲ τὰς μύσεις καὶ παρεγκλίσεις. The obstruction of menstrual flows because of the lack of an outlet was noted by other ancient medical writers—e.g., Oribasius, *Iatrikôn synagôgôn*, 24.32—and by medieval ones as well—al-Zahrawi, *Surg.*, 2.72. The modern solution is similar to the ancient one described by Soranus: a simple cruciate incision into the hymen. See J. Robert Willson et al., *Obstetrics and Gynecology* (St. Louis: Mosby, 1987), p. 99.

¹⁹ Paul of Aegina, *De re medica*, 6.70, ed. I. L. Heiberg (Corpus Medicorum Graecorum, 9.2) Heiberg (Leipzig: Teubner, 1924): Ὑπερμεγέθους ἐνίαις γίνεται νύμφη καὶ εἰς ἀπρέπειαν αἰσχύνῃς ἀπαντᾷ· καθὼς δὲ τινες ἱστοροῦσιν, ἐνίαι διὰ τοῦ μέρους καὶ ὀρθιάζουσιν ἀνδράσιν ὁμοίως καὶ πρὸς συνουσίαν ὀρμῶσιν. διόπερ ὑπτίας ἐσηματισμένης τῆς γυναικὸς μυδίῳ κατασχόντες τὸ περιττὸν τῆς νύμφης ἐκτέμνωμεν σμίλῃ φυλαττόμενοι τὸ ἐκ βάθους αὐτὴν ἐκτέμνειν, ἵνα μὴ ῥυαδικὸν ἐκ τούτου γένηται πάθος. On Paul of Aegina see E. F. Rice, "Paulus Aegineta," in *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum: Mediaeval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries*, Vol. 4, ed. F. E. Cranz and P. O. Kristeller (Washington,

of the passage in Paul's text, immediately after a description of surgeries for hermaphroditism, may be significant, suggesting that clitoridectomy was a procedure for intersexed persons, although this is far from certain; by comparison, the context for the passages taken from the works of Muschio and Caelius Aurelianus is cancer-like growths in the uterus.

Because nymphotomy was known among Greeks as something practiced by the Egyptians, and because Paul of Aegina himself lived in Alexandria, it has been assumed that he is describing Egyptian practice, though he does not specifically say so. As an aside, we might note here that there is only one citation from antiquity that suggests that FGM may have been practiced outside Egypt. Extant fragments from a fifth-century B.C.E. history of Lydia by Xanthos of Lydia, a contemporary of Herodotus, say:

The Lydians arrived at such a state of delicacy that they were even the first to "castrate" their women. . . . Thus Xanthos says in his second book on the Lydians that Adramytes, the king of the Lydians, castrating the women, used them instead of male eunuchs. . . . In the second book, he reports that Gyges, the king of the Lydians, was the first who "castrated" women, so that he might use them while they would remain forever youthful.

There is a problem, however, with equating the "castration" referred to here with FGM. The operation is not described, for one thing; and the explicit purpose of the "castration" was to keep the women youthful, presumably so that the Lydian king could have frequent intercourse without fear of causing pregnancy, since the verb *χράομαι* (here translated as a form of "to use") means "to be intimate with someone."²⁰ FGM does not have any effect on reproductive ability or on fertility. Although this is mere speculation, it is possible that the Lydians had invented a means of permanently sterilizing women.

THE ANCIENT MEDICAL SOURCES: GALEN AND AETIOS

More remarkable than the Soranus family of descriptions of the surgical procedure are two accounts that definitively place the practice in Egypt. The first is a brief mention of the operation in a work (*Εἰσαγωγή ἢ ἱατρός* ["Introduction; or, Physician"]) that has been ascribed to Galen (fl. mid-second century C.E.) but whose authenticity is suspect: "Between these [labia majora], a small bit of flesh, the clitoris, grows out at the split. When it sticks out to a great extent in their young women, Egyptians consider it appropriate to cut it out."²¹ (Galen may have described the operation in detail, but such an account has not survived.)

D.C.: Catholic Univ. America Press, 1980), pp. 145–191; and Lawrence J. Bliquez, "Two Lists of Greek Surgical Instruments and the State of Surgery in Byzantine Times," in *Symposium on Byzantine Medicine*, ed. John Scarborough (Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 38) (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984), pp. 187–204. See Bernadette J. Broton, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 162–168, for a probing, well-researched analysis of the Soranus family of texts and the "culturally problematic sexual behavior" that is at the root of these texts.

²⁰ *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, ed. Felix Jacoby (1923–1958; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 3C 765.F.B4: Λύδοι δ' εἰς τοσοῦτον ἦλθον τροφῆς, ὥς καὶ πρῶτοι γυναῖκας εὐνούχισαι . . . ὁ δ' οὖν Χάνθος ἐν τῇ δευτέρῃ τῶν Λυδιακῶν Ἀδραμύτην φησὶ βασιλέα πρῶτον γυναῖκας εὐνούχισαντα χρῆσθαι αὐταῖς ἀντὶ ἀνδρῶν εὐνούχων. . . ἐν δὲ τῇ δευτέρῃ τούτων ἱστορεῖ, ὥς πρῶτος Γύλης ὁ Λυδῶν βασιλεὺς γυναῖκας εὐνούχισεν, ὅπως αὐταῖς χρῶντο αἰεὶ νεαζούσαις. On the verb see Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, comps., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. by Henry Stuart Jones with Roderick McKenzie (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), *χράομαι*, IV.b.

²¹ Karl Gottlob Kühn, ed., *Medicorum graecorum opera quae extant* (Leipzig: Cnoblock, 1921–1933), Vol. 14, p. 706: τὸ δὲ μέσον τούτων κατὰ τὴν διασχίδα ἐκπεφυκὸς σαρκίδιον, νύμφη, ὃ καὶ διὰ τὸ προκύπτειν ἐπὶ πολὺ ἐκτομῆς ἀξιοῦται παρ' Αἰγυπτίους ἐπὶ τῶν παρθένων. On the ascription to Galen and its questionable authenticity see *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. cxlviii.

The second passage that places the practice in Egypt is by Aetios, a Greek physician and *comes obsequii* (official attendant physician) of the emperor Justinian I (ruled 527–565 C.E.). Aetios was born in Amida (now Diyarbakir in Turkey) and studied medicine in Alexandria in Egypt. He compiled a sixteen-book encyclopedic medical treatise βιβλία ἱατρικὰ ἑκκαίδεκα, also known as the *Tetrabiblon*, that drew on more ancient authors' works that in many cases are no longer extant. These earlier medical writers, including Oribasius, Soranos, Galen, and many others, are listed as his sources in the πίναξ (index list) of each book. Aetios's description of FGM appears in book 16, which was devoted to obstetrics and gynecology; he cites Philomenes, a Greek physician at Rome thought to be either a contemporary of Galen or to have lived a little later, as his source.²² The *nymphê*, or clitoris, was the primary focus of Aetios's operation, which was indicated in girls whose excessively large clitorides were viewed both as a deformity and as a source of sexual stimulus that would predispose "victims" to venery.

Aetios's account of the procedure is the fullest that is extant from antiquity. The girl is seated in a chair while a strong young man restrains her legs and the rest of her body from behind. The operator, positioned in front of the girl, grasps the νύμφη, or clitoris, with a forceps held in his left hand, pulling it toward him. Then he cuts it off just above the pincers of the forceps. Aetios warns that the base of the organ should not be removed, since there is a risk of cutting into the urinary outlet. The surgeon next wipes the wound with wine or cold water, and a sponge soaked in vinegar can be bandaged in place to staunch the bleeding. He then discusses postoperative ointments and powders for a recuperative period lasting about a week.

The so-called *nymphê* [clitoris] is a sort of muscular or skinlike structure that lies above the juncture of the labia minora; below it the urinary outlet is positioned. [This structure] grows in size and is increased to excess in certain women, becoming a deformity and a source of shame. Furthermore, its continual rubbing against the clothes irritates it, and that stimulates the appetite for sexual intercourse. On this account, it seemed proper to the Egyptians to remove it before it became greatly enlarged, especially at that time when the girls were about to be married. The surgery is performed in this way: Have the girl sit on a chair while a muscled young man standing behind her places his arms below the girl's thighs. Have him separate and steady her legs and whole body. Standing in front and taking hold of the clitoris with a broad-mouthed forceps in his left hand, the surgeon stretches it outward, while with the right hand, he cuts it off at the point next to the pincers of the forceps. It is proper to let a length remain from that cut off, about the size of the membrane that's between the nostrils,²³ so as to take away the excess material only; as I have said, the part to be removed is at that point just above the pincers

²² See the discussion of Aetios in James V. Ricci, *Aetios of Amida: The Gynecology and Obstetrics of the VIth Century, A.D., Translated from Cornarius' Text of 1542* (Philadelphia: Blakiston, 1950), pp. 5–9; and Marie-Hélène Marganne, *La chirurgie dans l'Égypte gréco-romaine d'après les papyrus littéraires grecs* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. xx–xxi. The Greek edition of his work—*Gynaekologie des Aëtios, sive sermo sextus decimus et ultimus, zum erstenmale aus Handschriften veröffentlicht*, ed. Skevos Zervos (Leipzig: Fock, 1901)—gives Philomenes as the source in the πίναξ, or index list; no source is cited in the sixteenth-century Latin translation of Cornarius. We have one extant treatise by Philomenes in Greek—*Philumeni De Venenatis animalibus eorumque remediis*, ed. Maximilian Wellmann (Corpus Medicorum Graecorum, 10.1.1) (Berlin: Teubner, 1908)—on animal poisons and their remedies, which was used as a source for Aetios's book 13, chs. 1–44. In addition, a number of fragments and several translations that were made into Latin are extant. See Wellmann, "Philomenos," *Hermes*, 1908, 43:373–404.

²³ Cf. the 1549 translation into Latin by Johannes Cornarius, *Aetii Medici graeci contractae ex veteribus medicinae Tetrabiblos, hoc est quaternio, id est libri universales quatuor, singuli quatuor sermones complexentes, ut sint in summa quatuor sermonum quaterniones, id est sermones XVI* (Basel: Froben, 1549), p. 902: "Mensura aiunt resectionis eandem quam in columellae sectione servare oportet, ut ne funditus ipsam resecemus." ["They assert that it is necessary to preserve the same measure of the part cut off as that in the resection of the uvula, so that we do not cut it off completely."]

of the forceps. Because the clitoris is a skinlike structure and stretches out excessively, do not cut off too much, as a urinary fistula [βοιάς] may result from cutting such large growths too deeply. After the surgery, it is recommended to treat the wound with wine or cold water, and wiping it clean with a sponge to sprinkle frankincense powder on it. Absorbent linen bandages dipped in vinegar should be secured in place, and a sponge in turn dipped in vinegar placed above. After the seventh day, spread the finest calamine on it. With it, either rose petals or a genital powder made from baked clay can be applied. This [RX] is especially good:²⁴ Roast and grind date pits and spread the powder on [the wound]; [this compound] also works against sores on the genitals.²⁵

Apart from its being both detailed and derived from a tradition separate from the Soranus family of manuscripts, Aetios's account is remarkable for two further reasons. First, he identifies precisely a physical mechanism that promotes clitoral stimulation—namely, the rubbing of the organ against the clothing, a feature that highlights the excessive size of this organ in affected patients—and notes that this irregular stimulation is an indication for surgery. Second, he states categorically that Egyptians perform this clitoral reduction surgery on their girls *before* they are married to prevent excessive enlargement of the organ.

MEDICAL PROCEDURE OR TEMPLE RITE?

Thus, Aetios's account appears strongly to corroborate Strabo's statement that Egyptians excise their females, but with the further suggestion that the procedure may have been performed in preparation for marriage. Yet equally remarkable is the highly developed character of Aetios's surgical operation and its assignment to the realm of male operators, which suggests that excision may not have been the exclusive provenance of midwives, at least not in Egypt (Muschio's work, cited earlier, was a handbook for midwives, but Aetios is describing a clearly Egyptian practice where the customary operator may have

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*: "linimentum posca madefactum indatur. Et spongia ex posca expressa superdeligetur. Post septimam vero, cadmiam minutissime tritam per se, aut cum rosarum floribus insperge. Aut sic cum ex lapide phrygia paratum, et ad pudendorum fissuras descriptum. Aut cinerem ossium palmularum insperge." ["A liniment moistened with *posca* (a mix of egg, vinegar, and water) is put on, and a sponge squeezed out of *posca* is fastened above. Moreover, after the seventh day, sprinkle finely ground calamine by itself or with rose powder, or likewise a powder prepared from Phrygian stone (modern identification not known; Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, 36.36.143, mentioned its use in dyeing), described at fissures of the pudendum. Or sprinkle on ashes of date pits."]

²⁵ Aetios, 16.105 (Zervos ed. [cit. n. 22]): 'Η λεγομένη νύμφη οἷον μυῶδες ἢ δερματώδες ἐστὶ συγκριμάτων κείμενον κατὰ τὴν ἀνωθεν τῶν πτερυγωμάτων συμβολήν. καθ' ὃν τόπον ἢ οὐρήθρα τέτακται· μεγεθύνεται δέ τιςιν ἐπὶ πλέον τῶν γυναικῶν αὐξησιν λαμβάνον, καὶ εἰς ἀπρέπειαν καὶ αἰσχύνην γίνεται. ἀλλὰ καὶ παρὰ τριβόμενον συνεχῶς ὑπὸ τῶν ἱματίων ἐρεθίζει, καὶ τὴν πρὸς συνουσίαν ὁρμὴν ἐπεγείρει, διόπερ πρὸ τῆς μεγεθοποιήσεως ἔδοξε τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις ἀφαιρεῖν αὐτὸ τότε μάλιστα, ὅποτε πρὸς γάμον ἄγεσθαι μέλλοιεν αἱ παρθένοι. ἐπιτελεῖται δὲ ἡ χειρουργία τὸν τρόπον τοῦτον. ἐδραζέτω μὲν ἡ παρθένος ἐπὶ δίφρου, παρεστῶς δὲ ὀπισθεν νεανίσκος εὐτονος ὑποβάλλων τοὺς ἰδίους πῆχεις ταῖς ἐκείνης ἰγνύαις, διακρατεῖται τὰ σκέλη καὶ τὸ ὅλον σῶμα· ἐστῶς δὲ ἐναντίον ὁ ἐνεργῶν καὶ μυδιὰ πλατυστόμφω συλλαβὼν τὴν νύμφην διὰ τῆς εὐωνύμου χειρὸς ἀποτεινέτω, τῇ δὲ δεξιᾷ ἀποτεινέτω παρὰ τοὺς ὀδόντας τοῦ μυδίου. μέτρον δὲ προσήκει κατέχειν ὥς ἐπὶ τῆς ἀποτεινομένης κιονίδος, ἵνα τὸ περιττεῦον μόνον ἀφαιρεθῇ· παρὰ δὲ τοὺς ὀδόντας τοῦ μυδίου τὴν ἀφαίρεσιν εἶπον γενέσθαι, διὰ τὸ δερματώδη εἶναι τὴν νύμφην καὶ παρακτείνεσθαι μέχρι πλείστου. ὥστε μὴ ἐκ τῆς περιττοτέρας ἀποκοπῆς ὥς ἐκ τῆς βαθυτέρας τῶν ἐγκανθίδων ἐκτομῆς ροιὰς ἐπακολουθεῖν. Μετὰ δὲ τὴν χειρουργίαν οἶψι προσήκει στυφεῖν τὴν ἔλκωσιν ἢ ψυχρῷ ὕδατι, καὶ ἀπομάξαντας σπόγγῳ μάνναν ἐπιπάττειν, καὶ μοτὸν ὀξύκράτῳ βρέχοντας ἐπιτιθέναι, καὶ ἀνωθεν σπόγγον ὀξύκράτῳ βεβρεγμένον πάλιν ἐπιτιθέναι· μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἐβδόμην καδμίαν λειοτάτην ἐπιπάσσειν. ἢ σὺν αὐτῇ ῥόδων ἄνθος, ἢ τὸ διὰ διφυροῦς λίθου ξηρὸν αἰδοῖκόν. καλὸν δὲ καὶ τοῦτο· ὅσα φαινίκων καύσας καὶ λεάνας ἐπιπάσσε τὴν σποδὸν, ποιεῖ καὶ πρὸς τὰ ἐν αἰδοίοις ἔλκη.

differed). In Egypt today FGM is frequently performed by males, either medical professionals or—more commonly, since it is now illegal—barbers and butchers.²⁶

The male gender of the operator may be significant in that it suggests that the procedure—at least in Graeco-Roman Egypt—was surgical, and not obstetrical.²⁷ Both gender-specific tasking and the surgical character of the procedure could theoretically have strong implications for understanding FGM in ancient Egypt. Surgical tools similar to those used in the operation described by Aetios—the forceps, surgeon's knife, and bandages—are present in a panel from the rear wall of the Temple of Sobek and Horus at Kom Ombo. It is thought that such surgical tools were not available to Egyptian physicians until the arrival of the Greeks and Romans; the Kom Ombo panel dates to the second century C.E. and appears to depict typical Roman tools. Most Egyptian surgical procedures were very simple, and, by one accounting, some "30,000 mummies had been investigated without a single surgical scar being reported."²⁸

Depictions of only three surgical procedures survive from pre-Hellenistic Egypt. One such procedure is male circumcision, represented by a scene from the Old Kingdom (ca. 2613–2181 B.C.E.) and another from the New Kingdom (ca. 1567–1085 B.C.E.). In the first of these, from the tomb of Ankh-ma-hor, the implement employed may be a stone knife or a razor, according to various authorities. And although the words of the panel have led to a debate over whether a priest is circumcising or being circumcised, some sort of ritual initiation seems to be taking place.²⁹ That is, the procedure depicted may not be strictly surgical, exclusively for medical indications.

Given that surgical (medical) procedures may have been relatively rare in pre-Greek Egypt and that Aetios suggests that FGM was performed before any clear medical indication necessitated the surgery, it is certainly possible that, if FGM was practiced before the arrival of the Greeks, it was viewed not as a medical procedure per se, but perhaps as a religious rite associated with temple life.³⁰ It is then plausible that the Greeks and Romans shifted the custom into the realm of physician-surgeons; conceivably, two types of operators may have coexisted, one traditional and the other informed by Graeco-Roman scientific theory and practice.

A papyrus now in the British Museum suggests that this may have been the case, since its subject, an Egyptian girl named Tathemis, was authorized by the Temple of Sarapis of Memphis to collect alms. The letter concerns money earmarked for Tathemis's circumcision, for which she needed a dowry and a suitable dress, all indications of her entering into womanhood:

²⁶ In the mid 1990s, male medical doctors and surgeons as well as barbers and others who work at *mulids* (festivals honoring Muslim popular "saints") accounted for 64 percent of operators, while midwives accounted for 36 percent: Fayyad, *Al-batr al-tanāsuli li-l-inath* (cit. n. 3), pp. 140–141. Gender-specific tasking is common in many areas where FGM is practiced; see Worsley, "Infibulation and Female Circumcision" (cit. n. 13), p. 687, which describes the situation in Sudan.

²⁷ Cf. Hdt., 2.84: ἡ δὲ ἰητρικὴ κατὰ τὰς εἰς δέδασται· μίης νοῦσου ἕκαστος ἰητρός ἐστι καὶ οὐ πλέονων. πάντα δ' ἰητρῶν ἐστὶ πλεῖα· οἱ μὲν γὰρ ὀφθαλμῶν ἰητροὶ κατεστῆασι, οἱ δὲ κεφαλῆς, οἱ δὲ ὀδόντων, οἱ δὲ τῶν κατὰ νηδύν, οἱ δὲ τῶν ἀφανέων νοῦσων. ["Medicine is divided according to the following way: Each doctor specializes in a single illness and no more. (Egypt) is full for doctors for everything. So there are doctors for the eyes, doctors for the head, doctors for the teeth, doctors for the belly, doctors for diseases that are not apparent."]

²⁸ John F. Nunn, *Ancient Egyptian Medicine* (Norman: Univ. Oklahoma Press, 1996), p. 164 f., describes the panel in detail and provides the relevant bibliography; for the quotation see p. 165.

²⁹ Ann Macy Roth, *Egyptian Phyles in the Old Kingdom: The Evolution of a System of Social Organization* (SAOC, 38) (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1991), pp. 66–68.

³⁰ See Montserrat, *Sex and Society in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (cit. n. 3), p. 43. Some scholars favor a strictly medical interpretation even for the pre-Greek period; see Roth, *Egyptian Phyles in the Old Kingdom*, p. 68.

Sometime after this, Nephoris defrauded me, being anxious that it was time for Tathemis to be circumcised, as is the custom among the Egyptians. She asked that I give her 1,300 drachmae from what [Tathemis] had paid me . . . to clothe her . . . and to provide her a marriage dowry, and [she promised that] if she didn't do each of these or if she did not circumcise Tathemis in the month of Mecheir, year 18 [163 B.C.E.], she would repay me 2,400 drachmae on the spot.³¹

It may be helpful to bear in mind that marriage did not disqualify priests and others affiliated with the temples from continuing their service.

Archaeologically, there may be confirmations that FGM existed even during the pre-Greek period. One tantalizing text is found on the sarcophagus of Sit-hedj-hotep, dating to the Middle Kingdom (12th dynasty, ca. 1991–1786 B.C.E.) and now preserved in the Egyptian Museum. The passage details a magical spell that is effected by the anointment of the spellcaster with certain body substances (*b3d*; exact meaning unknown) of an uncircumcised girl and an uncircumcised bald man.

As for any man who knows it while it is sealed, he is more glorious thereby than Osiris: He has passed every tribunal in which Thoth is, but Thoth will be in the tribunal of Osiris. If a man, a great one, who is on his lake of death, going to the Beautiful West, should recite it four times as a purification, then on the fourth day, he will go (die). [This] is correct more than anything. But if a man wants to know how to live, he should recite it every day, after his flesh has been rubbed with the *b3d* of an uncircumcised girl and the flakes of skin [*šnft*] of an uncircumcised bald man.³²

The presence of the word for uncircumcised male ('*m*') supports the translation of the word relating to the female, '*m*'*t*, as "uncircumcised," as most scholars have done.³³ This reading makes sense and is reasonable, although some Egyptologists are uncomfortable

³¹ *PLond* (= *Greek Papyri in the British Museum*, ed. F. G. Kenyon [London: British Museum, 1893]), 1.24 ll. 9–18 (164/163 B.C.E.): μετὰ δὲ τινα χρόνον τῆς Νεφόριτος παραλογισμένης με καὶ προενεγκαμένης τὴν Τάθημιν ὥραν ἔχειν ὡς ἔθος ἐστὶ τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις περιτέμνεσθαι ἀξιωσάσης τ' ἐμὲ δοῦναι αὐτῇ τὰς ἂν ἐφ' αὐτὸ ἐπιτελέσασα ἡματιεὶ αὐτὴν καὶ . . . ε . . . αὐτὴν ἀνδρὶ φερνιεῖν, ἐὰν δὲ μὴ ποιῇ ἕκαστον τούτων ἢ καὶ μὴ περτέμῃ τὴν Τάθημιν ἐν τῷ μεχείρ μηνὶ τοῦ ἡΛ ἀποτείσει μοι παραχρῆμα < βυ, Karl Sudhoff, "Beschneidung," in *Ärztliches aus griechischen Papyrus-Urkunden Bausteine zu einer medizinischen Kulturgeschichte des Hellenismus* (Leipzig: Barth, 1909), p. 178 f., sees an association between female circumcision and temple service. This view is not universal. Paul Wendland, "Die hellenistischen Zeugnisse über die ägyptische Beschneidung," *Archiv für Papyrusforschung*, 1903, 2:22–31, finds no ground for assuming that Tathemis's association with a temple was connected with her excision, since the letter indicates that the rite was an Egyptian custom preparatory to marriage (ὡς ἔθος ἐστὶ τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις—"as is the custom among the Egyptians").

³² Egyptian Museum sarcophagus cat. no. 28085. The passage reads, "[448d]" *ir s nb rḥ(t) sy sd3ti* [448e] *3ḥ sw im r Wsir* [449a] *iw sw3-n-f d3d3t nb(t) wnnt Dḥwty im-s wnn swt Dḥwty* [449b] *m d3d3t nt Wsir* [449c] *ir wnn s wr ḥt š-f n ḥpt r imnt nfrt* [449d] *šd sy s sḏm-f w'bt nt tp hrw 4* [449e] *hpp-f m fdn-nw-f* [450a] *mty r ḥp nbt* [450b] *ir swt mrr-f rḥ s'nh* [450c] *šdd-f sy r' nb* [450d] *sin-n-f 'wf-f m b3d* [lacuna] [idy] '*m't ḥn' šnfw nt i3s 'm'.*' The hieroglyphic text is in Pierre Lacau, *Sarcophages extérieurs au nouvel empire* (no. 28001–29086 [Cairo: IFAO, 1904], sarcophagus no. 28085 [inner coffin], Vol. 1, p. 217. It is *Coffin Text* spell 1117, 448d–450d; see the variorum edition by Adriaan de Buck and Alan H. Gardiner, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 1961), Vol. 7, pp. 448–450.

³³ Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, comps., *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie, 1982), Vol. 1, p. 185; Dimitri Meeks, *Année lexicographique*. Vol. 2 (Paris: Favard, 1978), p. 70; Alexandre Piankoff, *The Wandering of the Soul* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), p. 32; and Hermann Kees, *Totenglauben und Jenseitsvorstellungen der alten Ägypter* (Berlin: Akademie, 1956), p. 300 f. Eugen Strouhal, *Life of the Ancient Egyptians* (Norman: Univ. Oklahoma Press, 1992), p. 29, likewise concludes on the basis of this text that FGM was practiced. See also the comments by Emmanuel de Rougé, "Inscription historique du roi Pianchi-Mériamoun," *Bibliothèque Égyptologique*, 1911, 24:263–307, on p. 281 n 1; Frans Jonckheere, "La circoncision des anciens égyptiens," *Centaureus: International Magazine of the History of Science and Medicine*, 1950–1951, 1:212–234, esp. p. 216 f.; and Constant de Wit, "La circoncision chez les anciens égyptiens," *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* (ZÄS), 1972, 99:41–48, esp. p. 43.

with it. As with the English word "uncircumcised," the word *'m't* obviously does not tell us anything about the circumcised state—the degree of circumcision practiced at that time. To resolve this conundrum, Saphinaz-Amal Naguib analyzed this text and, with her reading of a hieroglyph that shows the position of the ancient Egyptian woman in labor, concluded that infibulation, or third-degree FGM, was not practiced in Egypt in antiquity, a hypothesis that accords well with the Greek descriptions of the clinical procedure already noted.³⁴

This conclusion was supported by physical examination of female mummies. G. Elliot Smith, an Australian pathologist in the early decades of the twentieth century who visually inspected hundreds of mummies, observed that infibulation had not been performed. In his remarks on the technique of mummification during the 21st dynasty, he stated that in most cases the skin of the labia majora, "while still soft and flexible, was pushed backward toward the anus so as to form an apron covering the rima pudenda" that gave the appearance of infibulation. We might speculate that this curious procedure was designed to ensure that the deceased was not violated, a hazard cited by Herodotus.³⁵ Smith did not specifically address the question of first- or second-degree circumcision, at least not in print; he recorded that soft tissues frequently were removed by the embalmers, either accidentally or deliberately, or deteriorated to a point where it was impossible to determine whether a lighter circumcision had been made.³⁶ In light of the fact that only rarely have scientific researchers autopsying mummies specifically looked for the presence or absence of FGM, conclusive remarks about the prevalence of the practice must await a detailed study of a large cohort of female mummies. (For scientific purposes, it is necessary for researchers to state negative findings as well as positive ones; the absence of remarks regarding FGM cannot be held as proof that it was not practiced, since we have no indication that most investigators even looked for signs of it.)

CIRCUMCISION OF MALES

A parallel surgical procedure, male circumcision, may help us understand the practice in females, especially if motivation for it can be satisfactorily identified. Certainly, it must be granted that several of the earliest male mummies yet found prove that male circumcision was already a familiar procedure in the Old Kingdom. Investigation of later mummies links the practice with priests and royalty.³⁷ This positive verification of the procedure contrasts with the situation with female mummies. As already noted, however, several factors may account for the lack of evidence in females: the manipulation of female external genitalia during the process of mummification altered the appearance to such a

³⁴ Saphinaz-Amal Naguib, "L'excision pharaonique—une appellation erronée?" *Bulletin de la Société d'Égyptologie*, Genève, 1982, no. 7, pp. 79–82. So-called pharaonic circumcision is thus a gross misnomer, since it appears not to have been practiced at any time in ancient Egypt.

³⁵ G. Elliot Smith, *A Contribution to the Study of Mummification in Egypt*. (Mémoires Présentés à l'Institut Égyptien et Publiés sous les Auspices de A. A. Abbas II, Khédive d'Égypte, 5[1]) (Cairo, 1906), p. 30; and Hdt., 2.89.

³⁶ This opinion was echoed by another early pathologist, who commented that "the bodies are in such a state that it would often be difficult to state with certainty whether such an operation had been done": Marc Armand Ruffer, *Studies in the Paleopathology of Egypt* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 1921), p. 171.

³⁷ Reports of uncircumcised males are not unusual, especially among nonroyal nonpriestly persons. See, e.g., Gerald D. Hart *et al.*, "Autopsy of an Egyptian Mummy (Nakht-ROM)," *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 1977, 117:461–476; and Aidan Cockburn *et al.*, "Autopsy of an Egyptian Mummy," *Science*, 1975, 197:1155–1160, who report on a mummy (Pum II) from ca. 700 B.C.E. More than eight thousand mummies were autopsied in the early part of the twentieth century (*ibid.*, p. 1155), but the autopsies were often conducted carelessly or in such haste that we do not have a reliable estimate of the percentage of males that were circumcised.

degree that no determination can be made regarding lighter forms of FGM; female corpses may have been delivered for mummification in a relatively putrefied state, as Herodotus notes; and, finally, researchers have not been specifically looking for the presence or absence of signs of FGM. Furthermore, it can be hypothesized that if circumcision were primarily ritualistic or associated with temple activities, given that fewer roles are attested for women than for men, then relatively fewer women may have undergone the procedure.

Two male circumcision scenes are attested iconographically; the first, as already mentioned, is from the tomb of Ankh-ma-hor in Saqqara that dates to the Old Kingdom. A second panel portraying the operation, from the Temple of Amenhotep III beside the Temple of Mut at Karnak, dates to the New Kingdom. This latter scene is interesting in that the mummy presumed to be Amenhotep III, the man who dedicated the panel, was found to be circumcised. Although the mummy thought to be that of this pharaoh's predecessor, Amenhotep II, likewise shows that circumcision had been performed, the practice does not appear to have been universal even among royal title holders, since the mummies held to be Amenhotep II and III's dynastic predecessors, Amenhotep I and Ahmose I, were not circumcised.³⁸

Identification of mummies cannot usually be verified with 100 percent certainty, yet the overall trend—some apparently royal corpses show circumcision while others from the same period do not—calls into doubt any historically comprehensive statement, such as Herodotus's Αἰγύπτιοι δὲ περιτάμνονται ("the Egyptians circumcise").³⁹ The popularity of circumcision may well have varied, but it nonetheless seems likely that priests, temple attendants, and royal and other high-ranking personages adhered fairly rigidly to the custom.⁴⁰

Apart from the ritual nature of male circumcision, other observations tangential to FGM may be broached. First, it must be conceded that the apparently public and open character of the operation in males, as depicted in the two wall panels, contrasts strikingly with the lack of public works celebrating a female's circumcision. It is worth noting, however, that in Egypt today there is a clear-cut distinction in the circumstances surrounding male and female circumcisions: the boy's event is public and widely celebrated with great cheer, whereas the girl's event is private, carried out with little fanfare or ostentation. In the case

³⁸ On the scene from the tomb of Ankh-ma-hor see Bertha Porter and Rosalind L. B. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1927–1951), Vol. 3, p. 514. A thorough discussion with bibliography is in Roth, *Egyptian Phyles in the Old Kingdom* (cit. n. 29), pp. 62–68. On the panel from the Temple of Amenhotep see F. Chabas, "De la circoncision chez les égyptiens," *Revue Archéologique*, N.S., 1861, 3:298–300; and Maurice Pillet, "Les scènes de naissance et de circoncision dans le temple nord-est de Mout, à Karnak," *Annales du Service des Antiquités d'Égypte*, 1952, 52:93–104. Amenhotep III's mummy was very badly damaged, with most of the flesh of the head missing, along with much of the other soft tissues: Salima Ikram and Aidan Dodson, *The Mummy in Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998), p. 324; it has been presumed that he was circumcised since he was the dedicant of the circumcision scene at Karnak. On Amenhotep II see G. Elliot Smith, *Royal Mummies* (Cairo: IFAO, 1912), p. 37. X-ray imaging has demonstrated that Amenhotep I and Ahmose I were not circumcised, although earlier investigators had presumed that they were. See James E. Harris and Kent R. Weeks, *X-raying the Pharaohs* (New York: Scribner's, 1973), pp. 126, 130.

³⁹ Hdt., 2.36.3; cf. Meinardus, "Mythological, Historical, and Sociological Aspects of Female Circumcision" (cit. n. 12), p. 389 f. I am reminded of a modern reverse parallel: when interviewed by Western researchers, a number of upper-class Egyptian women firmly denied that they had been circumcised, yet an Egyptian gynecologist who examined them found that in fact about 90 percent of them were circumcised (Mahmoud Karim, personal communication).

⁴⁰ See, e.g., de Wit, "Circoncision chez les anciens égyptiens" (cit. n. 33), p. 43; Jonckheere, "Circoncision des anciens égyptiens" (cit. n. 33), p. 231 f.; Sudhoff, "Beschneidung" (cit. n. 31), pp. 177–180; and Ulrich Wilcken, "Die ägyptischen Beschneidungsurkunden," *Arch. Papyrusforschung*, 1903, 2:9–12. Most scholars agree that the practice was more obligatory for the priestly class than for the common people.

of boys, the extended family and neighbors of both sexes freely join in a public celebration; the girl, by contrast, usually receives only immediate family members, and often only the females, at home. (This was the case even before female circumcision was made illegal and even when the practice was supported by the government.)⁴¹

It is notable that circumcision was practiced on boys at about the same age as FGM in girls. The boys depicted in the two circumcision scenes I have discussed are just entering puberty; certainly they are not infants. Two ancient authors, Philo Judaeus and Ambrose, indicate that the operation was done when children entered adulthood, for girls at about fourteen years of age. Philo, commenting on Genesis 17:10, says, "Why does He command that only the males be circumcised? In the first place, the Egyptians by the custom of their country circumcise the marriageable youth and maid in the fourteenth (year) of their age, when the male begins to get seed, and the female to have a menstrual flow." Ambrose, bishop of Milan (d. 397 C.E.), largely echoes Philo's words: "The Egyptians circumcise their males in the fourteenth year and the females among them are brought to be circumcised in the same year, because certainly from that year, the passion of manly sensation begins to burn and the monthly courses of women begin."⁴² Ambrose, however, seems to suggest a moral purpose in circumcising males, in that they begin to experience sexual desire at around the age of fourteen. This leads to the question of motivation: What was the likeliest motivating factor for FGM in ancient Egypt?

A MENU OF MOTIVATIONS

Given that the evidence suggests two general theaters of operation for FGM, one medical and curative and the other ritual in nature, it is likely that more than a single motivating factor accounts for the practice in antiquity. Aetios, Galen, and the Soranus family of sources provide a strictly clinical indication for excision, namely, an excessively large clitoris. It should be noted that the clitoris appears relatively larger in the prepubescent girl than in the adult woman: as she matures the organ does not grow substantially, in fact often becoming slightly smaller.⁴³ Yet Aetios is not referring to a child's normal clitoris, since he gives the instruction that a muscled young man should restrain the girl undergoing surgery. Even today, a greatly enlarged clitoris—say, about 1.5 inches in length—is an

⁴¹ Hamed Ammar, *Growing Up in an Egyptian Village, Silwa, Province of Aswan* (London: Routledge, 1954), p. 116; and John G. Kennedy, "Circumcision and Excision in Ancient Nubia," *Man*, 1970, 5:175–191, on p. 180.

⁴² Philo Judaeus, *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim*, 3.47, in *Philo: Questions and Answers on Genesis, Translated from the Ancient Armenian Version of the Original Greek*, trans. Ralph Marcus (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953). The Greek version of this work is now lost. Ambrose, *De Abrahamo* 2, 11.78 (348A–B), in *Sancti Ambrosii opera, pars prima*, ed. Karl Schenkl (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, 32) (Vienna: Tempusky, 1897): "denique Aegyptii quarto decimo anno circumcidunt mares et feminae apud eos eodem anno circumcidi feruntur, quod ab eo videlicet anno incipiat flagrare passio motus virilis et feminarum menstrua sumant exordia."

⁴³ The clitoris at birth is very near to its adult size, although it does grow throughout life, especially at puberty: Kumud Sane and Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, "The Clitoral Index: A Determination of Clitoral Size in Normal Girls and in Girls with Abnormal Sexual Development," *Journal of Pediatrics*, 1992, 120:264–266. Thus the clitoris frequently appears larger in girls than in women because of the relatively smaller size of girls and young children. A second growth spurt in the organ is associated with childbirth, with parous women having slightly, but still significantly, larger clitorides than nulliparous women: Barry S. Verkauf, James von Thron, and William F. O'Brien, "Clitoral Size in Normal Women," *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 1992, 80:41–44. Occasionally, growth is found in elderly women—John W. Huffman, "Some Facts about the Clitoris," *Postgraduate Medicine*, 1976, 60:245–247—presumably because of the relative increase in male to female hormones after menopause.

indication in both Egypt and the United States for a procedure similar to the one described by Aetios and Paul of Aegina.⁴⁴

These two surgeons remark on one of the complications of such a large clitoris: tactile contact with clothing stimulates the organ, making the patient subject to excessive desire for coitus. It seems significant that the description mentions a physical deformity;⁴⁵ there is no indication that excessive desire in females with normal clitorides can be corrected or even prevented by excision. It may be remarked here that there is a common misconception that FGM removes sexual desire; in fact, modern studies have found that women whose clitorides were excised at puberty or before experience a pronounced (normal) increase in desire in adulthood but that it is not matched by corresponding sexual satisfaction.⁴⁶ Physiologically, FGM does not treat venery, and the ancient Graeco-Roman surgical testimony does not indicate it as a surgical solution for a woman who is overly licentious or as a measure to prevent such licentiousness from developing.

Nevertheless, chastity may have entered into the traditions surrounding the procedure even at an early period, especially since Aetios suggests that it was performed to prevent a physical deformity from developing. Here, a comparison with modern experience in Egypt, where both curative and ritual theaters exist, may be enlightening. When queried about their motivation for circumcising their girls, modern Egyptian informants have offered primary explanations that vary widely over large blocks of time (say, from decade to decade); but if all given explanations are tracked over time, a menu limited to a few motivations emerges.⁴⁷ Some reasons wax and wane in popularity, whereas others are cited for a short time and then disappear. Although modern motivations cannot serve as evidence for ancient counterparts, the modern situation suggests the most satisfactory comprehensive statement: as the tradition of FGM became embedded within the culture, new reasons mixed with old ones to favor continuation of a practice whose original motivation most likely had long been forgotten. Medical, clinical, and curative motivations probably mixed with ritual, social, and moral reasons to favor the continuation and spread of a practice that initially may have been narrowly performed.

We may nonetheless be able to identify a menu of ancient motivations, apart from the strictly medical, curative motivations described in Aetios, Galen, and the Soranus family of manuscripts, especially if we make reference to male circumcision. Most commentators, such as Herodotus, refer to cleanliness or hygiene as the principal reason why Egyptians practiced the custom. Complementary to this is the idea of perfection—that is, the circumcised were free not only of transitory filth and pollution but also of inherent blemishes or flaws.⁴⁸ These qualities were very important to the priests and other temple personnel, in

⁴⁴ See, e.g., the reduction method described in J. Engert, "Surgical Correction of Virilised Female External Genitalia," *Progress in Pediatric Surgery*, 1989, 23:151–164, esp. pp. 161–163. Like the ancient surgeons, Engert strongly underscores the need to maintain sensitivity in the organ: "For a woman, preservation of clitoral sensitivity is essential to a satisfying sexual life. All techniques involving total clitoridectomy. . . must therefore be discarded" (p. 151).

⁴⁵ An excessively large clitoris was recognized by laypersons even in Rome, although they tended to treat women so afflicted with derision. E.g., an inscription (*Corpus inscriptionum latinarum*, 4.10004 [Berlin: Reimer, 1892–]) describes one such woman: "Euplia laxa landicosa." ["Euplia has a clitoris that's big and loose."] Cf. Martial, *Epigrammata*, 1.90, l.8; and *Priapea*, 12.14.

⁴⁶ Shandall, "Circumcision and Infibulation of Females" (cit. n. 12), p. 193 f.; and Karim, *Female Genital Mutilation* (cit. n. 12), p. 113. Shandall (p. 195) further noted that circumcision, and especially infibulation, did not deter young women from seeking multiple sexual partners; see the discussion by Karim (p. 128 f.).

⁴⁷ Karim, *Female Genital Mutilation*, p. 66.

⁴⁸ Regarding cleanliness see Hdt., 2.37.2: τὰ τε αἰδοῖα περτάμνονται καθαριότητος εἵνεκεν, προτιμῶν-τες καθαροὶ εἶναι ἢ εὐπρεπέστεροι. ["They circumcise the genitals for cleanliness, preferring to be clean

whom, it has already been noted, circumcision was primarily practiced.⁴⁹ In this vein, we might add that the priests may have valued the procedure for its ritual character, which would have contributed to its propagation and continuation.

The widest menu of motivations for circumcision is provided by Philo Judaeus, who cites four reasons in his work *De specialibus legibus* ("On the special laws") for the practice among the ancients, including the Egyptians. One, of course, was hygiene, but another was that circumcision prevents what was called in Greek ἀνθραξ, equivalent to modern phimosi. ⁵⁰ Modern clinical studies have found that, contrary to Philo's assertion, circumcision does not significantly reduce the occurrence of this disease, provided ordinary hygienic practices, such as washing, are observed.⁵¹ In any case, this reason cannot find a parallel in FGM.⁵²

Philo then states that circumcision makes the generative organ similar to the heart. Both heart and sex organs were designed by the deity for generation: the heart for new spiritual life through the divine and the sex organs for new material life blessed by the divine.

rather than very good looking." Cf. Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris*, 4–5 (= *Moralia*, 352 c–f). With respect to perfection see *Ägyptische Urkunden aus den königlichen [Staatliche] Museen zu Berlin* (Berlin: Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, 1895–), 13.2216, ll. 25–28: 'Αγαθοκλῆς ἐπύθετο, εἴ τινα σημεῖα ἔχουσιν οἱ παῖδες ἐπὶ τοῦ σώματος· Ἰμοῦθου ἱερογραμματέως εἰπόντος ἀσήμους αὐτοὺς εἶναι, Κλαύδιος 'Αγαθοκλῆς ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ἱερῶν παρασημειωσάμενος τὴν ἐπιστολὴν τῷ Πακῶσι εἶπεν· δύνανται καθ' ἃ ἀξιοῖς οἱ υἱοὶ σου 'Αρπαγάθης καὶ 'Ανχῶφης καὶ Στοτοήτις περιτμηθῆναι κατὰ τὸ ἔθος. ["Agathokles asked whether the boys had any birthmarks or other blemishes on their bodies; when the hierogrammateus said they were without any, Claudius Agathokles, the high priest and the overseer of the temples in Egypt, putting his seal on the letter, said, 'Your sons, Harpagathes and Anchophis, and Stotoetis, at your request, are able to be circumcised according to custom.'"]

⁴⁹ Inscriptional evidence indicates that women in priestly families were expected to serve as priestesses; see Adolf Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Dover, 1971), p. 291 n 13.

⁵⁰ For the four reasons in their entirety see Philo, *De specialibus legibus*, 1.1 (pp. 210–211M), in *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt*, ed. Leopold Cohn and Paul Wendland (1896–1930; Berlin: Reimer, 1962–1963). On cleanliness see *ibid.*, 1.1.5: δεῦτερον δὲ τὴν δι' ὅλου τοῦ σώματος καθαριότητα πρὸς τὸ ἀρμόττον τάξει ἱερῶμένη, παρὸ καὶ ξυρῶνται τὰ σώματα προσυπερβάλλοντες οἱ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ τῶν ἱερῶν ὑποσπλάγγεται γὰρ καὶ ὑποστέλλει καὶ θριξὶ καὶ ποσθίαις ἐνια τῶν ὀφειλόντων καθαίρεσθαι. ["(Circumcision provides), secondly, cleanliness of the whole body in accordance with what is fitting for the priestly class. As a result, carrying it to an extreme, some of the priests in Egypt also shave the body, since certain substances (e.g., smegma) that must be removed gradually collect and even draw back both hair and foreskin."] On ἀνθραξ see *ibid.*, 1.1.4: ἐν μὲν χαλεπῆς νόσου καὶ δυσίατου, ποσθῆνης, ἀπαλλαγὴν, ἣν ἀνθρώποι καλοῦσιν, ἀπὸ τοῦ καίειν ἐντυφόμενον, ὥς οἶμαι, ταύτης τῆς προσηγορίας τυχόντα, ὅπερ εὐκολώτερον τοῖς ἀκροποσθίαις ἔχουσιν ἐγγίνεται. ["(Circumcision provides), first, a way of avoiding a difficult and incurable disease, that of the prepuce, which they call anthrax ('charcoal,' equivalent to modern phimosi), taking its name, I believe, from its smoldering burn. It occurs more readily in those who have a foreskin."]

⁵¹ Results of one study demonstrated that "regular hygiene with retraction of the foreskin significantly decreased the incidence of phimosi, adhesions, smegma accumulation, and inflammation": Heather Krueger and Lucy Osborn, "Effects of Hygiene among the Uncircumcised," *Journal of Family Practice*, 1986, 22:353–355, on p. 355. Patients who did not retract the foreskin in washing had significantly higher rates of phimosi and other associated conditions (p. 354). Education on what constitutes proper hygiene appears to be crucial, since another study that did not include patient instruction in hygiene as a variable found that penile problems were significantly higher in a group of uncircumcised boys than in a circumcised group: Lynn W. Herzog and Susana R. Alvarez, "The Frequency of Foreskin Problems in Uncircumcised Children," *American Journal of Diseases of Children*, 1986, 140:254–256. The American Academy of Pediatrics Task Force on Circumcision has recognized the importance of appropriate genital hygiene, advising that it "be emphasized as a preventive health topic throughout a patient's lifetime": "Circumcision Policy Statement," *Pediatrics*, 1999, 103:687.

⁵² A search of the literature revealed a single case study of female phimosi: D. G. McLintock, "Phimosi of the Prepuce of the Clitoris: Indication for Female Circumcision," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1985, 78:257–258. It is noteworthy that the patient had type 1 diabetes, since certain conditions associated with diabetes, such as polycystic ovarian syndrome, are linked with clitoral hypertrophy: Jan Hofeješ, "Acquired Clitoral Enlargement: Diagnosis and Treatment," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1997, 816:362–369. In addition, removal of the hood of the clitoris alone, while it is theoretically possible, has not been reported in the literature; see Toubia, "Female Circumcision" (cit. n. 12), p. 712.

Circumcision effectively removes the seal on the physical generative organ, permitting reproduction to take place, just as an uncircumcised heart cannot produce good, moral thoughts. Almost as a corollary to this idea, Philo states his fourth reason: that circumcision makes the man more fertile because the path of the semen is not obstructed.⁵³

The association between circumcision and generative ability is likewise reflected in Egyptian textual evidence, as in the *Book of the Dead*, chapter 17, which glorifies and praises the creator Ra and all his creation: “What is this? It is the blood that fell from the phallus of Ra when he mutilated himself. It became the gods Hu (Authority) and Sa (Wisdom), who follow Ra and who accompany Atum daily and every day.” This chapter is one of the oldest and most fundamental among the *Book of the Dead* texts. Ra’s self-mutilation is understood by most commentators as a reference to circumcision. The visible sign of blood from circumcising becomes the physical sign of generative power. Furthermore, returning to the text found on the sarcophagus of Sit-hedj-hotep, there may be an association between sealing and ritual magic involving uncircumcised persons. The spell detailed in the text was part of a longer series, now called *The Book of Two Ways* (Coffin Texts spells 1029–1185), intended to guide the deceased past the hazards on the trip to the realm of the afterlife.⁵⁴ One key station was judgment by the gods, especially Thoth, and spell 1117 appears to guarantee the deceased the ability to pass this tribunal with ease. There may be some sympathetic magic in using parts of persons—whether young or old, male or female—whose generative organs are still sealed as an aid in knowing what is sealed or perhaps even knowing how to hide something from the scrutiny of the wise judge Thoth.

UNSEALING THE GENERATIVE ORGAN

The perceived causal link between circumcision and generative ability, whether or not it is physiologically accurate, is certainly powerful validation for the practice from the point of view of ritual. I would also like to suggest that it may be a clue to the origin of FGM, although my analysis is merely hypothetical. Given that male circumcision is attested iconographically, textually, and physically from a very early date and that evidence for female circumcision does not appear until the Middle Kingdom at the earliest, scholars

⁵³ Philo, *Spec. Leg.*, 1.1.6: τρίτον δὲ τὴν πρὸς καρδίαν ὁμοιότητα τοῦ περιτμηθέντος μέρους· πρὸς γὰρ γένεσιν ἄμφω παρεσκευάσται, τὸ μὲν ἐγκάρδιον πνεῦμα νοημάτων, τὸ δὲ γόνιμον ὄργανον ζῶων· ἐδικαίωσαν γὰρ οἱ πρῶτοι τῷ ἀφανεί καὶ κρείττονι, δι’ οὗ τὰ νοητὰ συνίσταται, τὸ ἐμφανὲς καὶ ὁρατόν, ὃ τὰ αἰσθητὰ γεννᾶσθαι πέφυκεν, ἐξομοιωσάτω. [“Third, (circumcision provides) resemblance to the heart, since both are designed for creation, the spirit in the heart for (producing) thought and the generative organ for (producing) living beings. The first people rightly claimed that the material and visible element, by which perceptible things come into being, should be assimilated to the unseen and the better element, by which thought exists.”] On the uncircumcised heart see Ezekiel 44.7; Romans 2.29; and Quran, 2.88. For the fourth reason see Philo, *Spec. Leg.*, 1.1.7: τέταρτον δὲ καὶ ἀναγκαιότατον τὴν πρὸς πολυγονίαν παρασκευὴν λέγεται γὰρ ὡς εὐδοεῖ τὸ στέρμα μῆτε σκιδνάμενον μῆτε περιρρέον εἰς τοὺς τῆς ποσθίας κόλπους· ὅθεν καὶ τὰ περιτεμνόμενα τῶν ἐθνῶν πολυγονώτατα καὶ πολυανθρωπότατα εἶναι δοκεῖ. [“(Circumcision provides), fourth and most necessary, the preparation for fecundity, since it is said that the sperm thus has a free course, neither scattering nor slipping away into the folds of the foreskin. As a result those of the peoples who are circumcised seem to be the most fecund and the most populous.”]

⁵⁴ *Book of the Dead*, 17.60–63. The passage reads “pfrt r f sw. snf pw pr(w) m hnnw n R’ mht w3-f r irt š’d im-f ds-f. ‘h’-n-w hpr m ntrw imyw-ht R’, Hw hn’ Ši3, wnn-sn m-ht ‘Itmw m hrt hrw nt hr’w nb.” On Ra’s act as circumcision see Chabas, “Circoncision chez les égyptiens” (cit. n. 38), p. 300; Jonckheere, “Circoncision des anciens égyptiens” (cit. n. 33), p. 215; and de Wit, “Circoncision chez les anciens égyptiens” (cit. n. 33), p. 42. Cf. Ursula Verhoeven, *Das salitische Totenbuch der Iahtesnacht* (Bonn: Habelt, 1993), p. 100 n 1. On the spell see Piankoff, *Wandering of the Soul* (cit. n. 33), pp. 7–11; and Leonard H. Lesko, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of Two Ways* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1972), pp. 2–7.

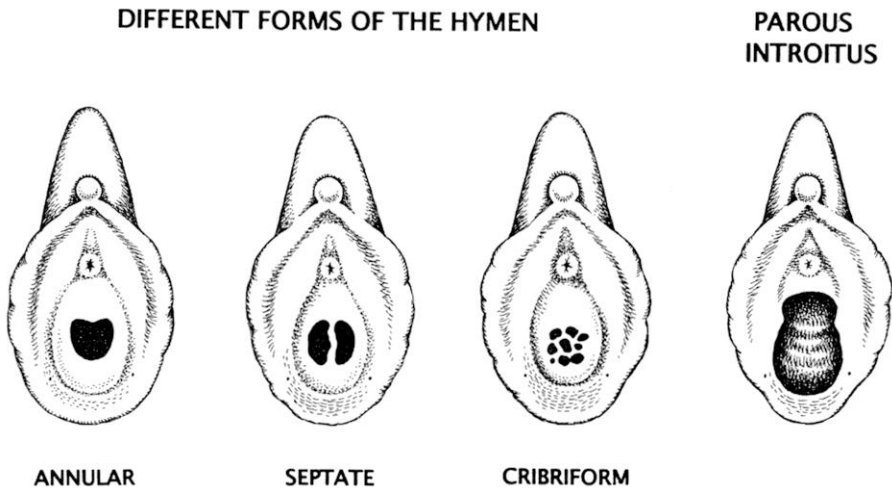


Figure 3. Three forms of intact hymen (annular, septate, and cribriform) reveal the diversity in this membranous tissue. Nevertheless, in spite of the individual variation, the contrast with the same area in a woman who has given birth (far right, parous introitus) is clear, pronounced, and readily perceived. (Illustration by Patricia J. Wynne.)

have long assumed that the practice in females was invented to mirror that in males. Taking the oldest recorded motivation we have for Egyptian male circumcision—that circumcision unsealed the generative organ—as a starting point, I would like to propose that male circumcision originally was invented to mirror a natural process in females. Indeed, this process usually is marked with a sign of blood, and it effectively opens the womb to production of new life: it is the breaking of the hymen that normally occurs on first intercourse, especially if the female is fairly young. (See Figure 3.)⁵⁵

The hymen in young female humans is a unique sexual feature not found in other primates. It has been speculated that sexual selection accounts for its evolution, on the theory that girls with hymens were preferred over those without them because the former could “prove” their virginal status. A more plausible theory is that the hymen is an embryonic structure retained throughout infancy and childhood as a means of protecting girls from infection, a barrier against organisms that might be introduced into the vagina through inadequate hygiene. The protective barrier becomes less important as the girl matures and is able to clean herself appropriately, and the loss of the hymen can serve as a biologic marker of a female’s adult status. More pointedly stated, the hymen has been found in all normal female infants, although it is recognized that the vaginal orifice and surrounding tissue become distensible with adult levels of circulating female hormones, a fact that makes the hymen unreliable for virginity tests in older girls.⁵⁶ In prepubertal girls, however,

⁵⁵ The human hymens illustrated in Figure 3 are intended to show some of the general variation in types; see Karim, *Circumcisions and Mutilations* (cit. n. 12), p. 21 f. See also the following articles on hymen variation and terminology in normal (i.e., nonsexually abused) girls: Susan Ferrell Pokorny, “Configuration of the Prepubertal Hymen,” *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 1987, 157:950–956; Abbey B. Berenson *et al.*, “Appearance of the Hymen in Prepubertal Girls,” *Pediatrics*, 1992, 89:387–394; and J. Jane Gardner, “Descriptive Study of Genital Variation in Healthy, Nonabused Premenarchal Girls,” *J. Pediatr.*, 1992, 120:251–257.

⁵⁶ A. J. Hobday, L. Haury, and P. K. Dayton, “Function of the Human Hymen,” *Medical Hypotheses*, 1997, 49:171–173; Carole Jenny, Mary L. D. Kuhns, and Fukiko Arakawa, “Hymens in Newborn Female Infants,” *Pediatrics*, 1987, 80:399–400; and Pokorny, “Configuration of the Prepubertal Hymen,” p. 954.

the presence and the appearance of the hymen are useful indicators, although physicians and other health-care professionals in the United States today are trained to assess appearance primarily in cases of suspected sexual abuse.

The most striking points to be taken from modern research on the hymen are these. The hymen is not directly related to virginity; this is a false construct. But it is always conversely related to fertility, in that absolutely no female human being who has given birth (proof of fertility) has an intact hymen. From that perspective, an ancient theorist could indeed have asserted that the breaking of the hymen “unseals” a young woman’s genital organs, since this breaking, with its characteristic blood sign, is a precursor of (potential) fertility.

Although the hymen structure was apparently not known to Greek or Roman medical specialists until a fairly late period, it is not unknown among many so-called primitive peoples.⁵⁷ It is possible that ancient Egyptians before recorded history noted the association between the broken hymen and a subsequent pregnancy and created circumcision as a symmetric sign to celebrate the adult capabilities and responsibilities of young men; such an association could account for the motivation for male circumcision, noted earlier, of making a man more fertile. We know in fact that a significant number of Old Kingdom rituals were lost, misconstrued, or adapted by the Middle Kingdom and later regimes.⁵⁸ Stretching the analysis farther, it is possible that the original symmetry of broken hymen and circumcised prepuce was forgotten and that a new ritual—FGM—was developed to maintain the appearance of symmetry.

⁵⁷ The existence of a hymen was denied by Soranus (1.17); see comments in Giulia Sissa, *Greek Virginity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1990), p. 113 f., which also explores the idea of hymenless virginity in ancient Greece (pp. 168–173). On knowledge of the hymen among “primitive” peoples see Herant A. Kat-chadorian and Donald T. Lunde, *Biological Aspects of Human Sexuality* (New York: Holt, 1975), p. 19. See also Elisha P. Renne, “Virginity Cloths and Vaginal Coverings in Ekiti, Nigeria,” in *Clothing and Difference: Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa*, ed. Hildi Hendrickson (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 19–33, for a discussion of how the physical hymen has been conflated with a material object (cloth) in a traditional society undergoing transition to a more Westernized pattern. The intellectual recognition of an association between the physical hymen and virginity is not lost, however. Even in more developed cultures, the hymen remains the focus for determining virginity. For example, Guillermo Uribe Cualla, a Colombian legal expert, concluded that only complete rupture of the hymen, not injury or incomplete rupture, should be taken as the medicolegal standard for defining defloracion in his country: Uribe Cualla, “Cual debe ser la base para el diagnóstico médico-legal de la desfloración,” *Zacchia*, 1971, 46:1–6, esp. p. 4. Another remarkable situation exists in Egypt today, where surgeons have discovered how lucrative hymen repair can be for less-than-perfect brides-to-be; see Peter Kandela, “Egypt’s Trade in Hymen Repair,” *Lancet*, 1996, 347:1615. Recently, religious authorities at al-Azhar have wisely affirmed that the presence of a hymen is not a valid precondition for marriage; see Nevene M. Shawki, “Hymen or No Hymen, Marriage Ruled Valid,” *Egyptian Gazette*, 19 Sept. 2000, p. 7.

⁵⁸ See A. Rosalie David, *The Ancient Egyptians* (New York: Routledge, 1982), Ch. 3, esp. pp. 92 f., 105–112; and Klaus Koch, *Geschichte der ägyptischen Religion von den Pyramiden bis zu den Mysterien der Isis* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993), pp. 209–240.



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WOMEN AS PROPERTY OWNERS IN ROMAN EGYPT*

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It has long been acknowledged¹ that women in Roman Egypt seem to have owned a fair amount of private property, but this potentially significant fact has, until very recently,² hardly transcended the realm of passing observation.³ Although numerous scholars have examined and discussed the ethnic composition of the Egyptian population during the

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1980 meeting of the American Philological Association in New Orleans. Preliminary work on this subject was carried out during a very enjoyable year spent at the Institute for Advanced Study in 1978/9. My interest in discovering and defining the limits of female property ownership in Roman Egypt emerged from numerous entertaining and profitable conversations with Professor J. F. Gilliam, to whom I dedicate this modest effort with affection and gratitude. I should also like to express my appreciation to the two referees who read this article for *TAPA*, whose constructive criticisms I have tried to take account of in what I present here.

Papyrological abbreviations used here are those found in *Checklist of Editions of Greek Papyri and Ostraca*, *BASP Supplement 1* (1978).

¹ See, e.g., A. C. Johnson, *Roman Egypt to the Reign of Diocletian* (Baltimore 1936) 28, 31, 227f., 682 note 5.

² Since I delivered the first version of this paper, S. Pomeroy has published "Women in Roman Egypt: A Preliminary Study Based on Papyri," *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, ed. H. Foley (London 1981) 303–22.

³ See, e.g., C. Préaux, "Le Statut de la femme à l'époque hellénistique, principalement en Egypte," *Recueils de la société Jean Bodin 11: La femme* (1959) 174, and the references cited therein. Préaux's focus is, however, more juridical than sociological, and her study does not therefore encompass the concerns of the present paper.

A hopeful indication of a growing awareness of the ownership of property by women in Egypt is perhaps suggested by a comparison between two treatments of one document, the first published thirty years ago and the second in 1978: in a discussion of *P. Flor.* I 71, a large fourth-century land register from the Hermopolite nome, A. H. M. Jones, "Census Records of the Later Roman Empire," *JRS* 43 (1953) 58–63 makes only one allusion to the fact that there were numerous female landowners on the list, when he refers (58) to the quantity of land which "he or she" held. Elsewhere throughout his article landowners are always referred to as "the man who . . ." On the contrary, in a recent republication of this register together with P. Giss. Inv. 4 (= *Zwei Landlisten aus dem Hermopolites*, ed. P. J. Sijpesteijn and K. A. Worp [Amsterdam 1978]), the sex of the landowners is noted, pp. 23f. (334 men and 57 women).

Greco-Roman period in order to determine the extent to which the country may have been Hellenized or Romanized,⁴ there has been remarkably little interest in the question of how extensively it may have been "feminized."⁵ The truth is that since women were able to derive property from their families through dowry and inheritance,⁶ but were not liable to the poll tax nor to the same range of liturgical functions as men,⁷ their capacity to acquire property would seem to have been in theory at least as great as that of men, while their potential liabilities may well have been considerably fewer.⁸

As far as I know, no one has ever explored the implications of this situation by making a detailed study of the economic activities of women within a particular community, although the papyri provide us with an abundance of relevant evidence for this kind of an investigation. The present paper represents an initial attempt to rectify this omission, by a consideration of the economic position of women property owners in the small village of Socnopaïou Nesos, a village at the western border of the Fayum oasis which existed from about 250 B.C. to A.D. 250. As source material for this investigation we have about 950 published Greek papyri of the Roman period⁹ emanating from or relating to this site, of

⁴ On this subject see D. H. Samuel, "Greeks and Romans at Socnopaïou Nesos," *Proceedings of the XVI Congress of Papyrology = American Studies in Papyrology* 23 (Chico, Calif. 1981) 389–403, esp. the references cited at p. 390, note 5.

⁵ The basic literature on the subject of women in Greco-Roman Egypt is cited by Pomeroy (above, note 2) 318, note 2.

⁶ See R. Taubenschlag, *The Law of Greco-Roman Egypt in the Light of the Papyri*, 332 BC–640 AD (New York 1944) 150f.

⁷ On the exemption of women from liturgical service see N. Lewis, "Exemptions from Liturgy in Roman Egypt," *Actes du X^e Congrès International de Papyrologie, Varsovie-Cracovie, 3–9 Septembre 1961* (Warsaw 1964), 70 and note 5. See also BGU II 648.92–94, *P. Tebt.* 327 and *P. Oxy.* VI 899.

⁸ Thus Johnson (above, note 1) 28 remarks that "there was a tendency for private property to pass into the hands of women, who could not be appointed for liturgies nor be assigned land for forced cultivation." On this point see Pomeroy (above, note 2) 313 and note 20.

⁹ The Ptolemaic papyri from Socnopaïou Nesos are too few in number to be taken into account for the purposes of this paper; Pomeroy (above, note 2) 304ff. attempts to establish a change in government policy affecting women and their capacity to own property from the Ptolemaic to the Roman era, but her argument is (by her own admission) largely *ex silentio* and does not seem to me to be substantiated by the small amount of evidence we do have from the Ptolemaic period. The fact that land is not included in the provisions of dowries before the Roman period (as pointed out by Pomeroy at 304) is not significant in light of the fact that women are given land in wills at least as early as 238 B.C. (see below, note 32). The phenomenon Pomeroy is concerned with (i.e. increased ownership of private land by women in the Roman period) would have been true of men as well, as Johnson points out (above, note 1) 27). However, the focus of the present paper is on the Roman period, and it is not within the scope of this investigation to make any comparisons between the Ptolemaic and Roman eras, particularly in the absence of sufficient relevant evidence.

which a total of 271 documents provide us with some kind of information about ownership of property within the village.¹⁰ From an analysis of these texts we can obtain a fairly clear picture of the role of women in the economic life of the village.¹¹

In this paper I shall first discuss the results obtained from an examination of the documents from Socnopaïou Nesos, and I shall then place these specific results from one small village into the larger context of Egypt as a whole by considering the patterns of property transmission which are embodied in the provisions of wills from the Roman period. In this way I hope to be able to clarify the role of women property owners in the economy of Roman Egypt.

Socnopaïou Nesos was in many ways not a very typical Fayum village. Since it was the center of an important cult of the crocodile god Souchos, there was a large priestly class in the village, among whom the women members figured prominently. Because the village was situated at the extreme western edge of the cultivated area of the Fayum and at the end of the irrigation system, agricultural conditions were poor, which almost certainly explains why it appears to have been of so little interest to the Greeks and Romans.¹² In fact our evidence indicates that the village had no privately-owned agricultural land at all,¹³ although some residents owned a certain amount of land in other villages.¹⁴ Since the village was at the edge of Lake Moeris and on the border of the desert, there was a customs house located there which regulated commercial traffic passing in and out of the nome, and the village seems to have provided transportation services for goods passing through this customs house.¹⁵

¹⁰ It is indeed a sobering experience for a classicist, who feels tempted to reconstruct a society from what might seem like the vast quantity of documentary evidence represented by 950 Greek papyri, to contemplate the enormous amount of material available for similar analysis to scholars of later periods; see, for example, David Herlihy, "Land, Family and Women in Continental Europe, 701-1200," *Traditio* 18 (1962) 89-120.

¹¹ My use of the term "economic role" of women refers throughout to their functioning in the world beyond their immediate households. Cf. D. M. Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh 1979) esp. p. 2.

¹² See Samuel (above, note 4) 400f.

¹³ In *P. Gen.* 16 = *W. Chr.* 354 (A.D. 207), a group of public farmers from Socnopaïou Nesos, in petitioning against an injustice they have suffered at the hands of some violent usurpers of their communal land, specifically state that their village has no land other than the public land along the shore (αἰγίαλος)

... ἔνεκ[α τοῦ] μὴ ἔχῃ τὴν κώμην μήτε ἰδι[ω]τικὴν μήτε βασιλικήν
μηδὲ ἄλλην εἰδέαν. . . . (16f.)

¹⁴ On this point, see D. W. Hobson (Samuel), "The Village of Apias in the Arsinoite Nome," *Aegyptus* 62 (1982) 80-123.

¹⁵ The importance of transportation services provided by residents of Socnopaïou Nesos is reflected in the large number of documents from the village which relate to ownership of camels; see below, note 22.

Because of its particular location, therefore, the economy of Socnopaïou Nesos had a distinctive character among Fayum villages, in that it seems to have been based on commerce rather than agriculture. For this reason property ownership is not manifested in the usual form of possession of agricultural land, as it would be for other villages, but rather in terms of possession of houses, camels, slaves, and capital.¹⁶ Thus when we set out to examine the extent to which women appeared as property owners in Socnopaïou Nesos, we are actually looking at the extent to which they owned houses, camels, slaves, or money, whereas, for example, in the case of Karanis we are able to evaluate women's property by calculating their land holdings as these are reflected in the land tax payments recorded in the village tax rolls (see below, p. 315).

When one charts the extent to which women figure among these various categories of property, one finds that they appear most frequently as owners of houses or parts of houses. There are several types of document which record house ownership, and in each of these women are strongly represented. Among the 32 documents recording sales of houses¹⁷ there are 35 women principals as compared with 36 men. Among twelve documents recording registration of property,¹⁸ there are eight women property owners and 17 men.¹⁹ Of twelve extant census declarations from Socnopaïou Nesos²⁰ only one (*P. Rein.* I 46) is that of a woman householder, but the women listed as members of the declarants' households in the other census returns own an impressive amount of property. A particularly noteworthy example is that found in *P. Grenf.* II 55, where the declarant is a 25-year-old man who has a 13-year-old wife who owns $2\frac{1}{4}$ houses, and another 12-year-old girl living in the same household (presumably therefore a relative) owns $2\frac{1}{2}$ houses. Yet the male head of this household lives in a house which he states he has inherited from his mother, and he apparently owns no other properties.

From these disparate pieces of evidence, spread as they are over a time period of some two hundred years, it is hard to arrive at an estimate of the percentage of houses owned by women in this village; however, if one correlates the figures for home ownership, where almost as many women appear as men, with the figures for property registrations, where about one-third of the registrants are women, one can, I think,

¹⁶ Pomeroy (above, note 2) does not deal with these forms of property ownership and appears to regard land ownership as the only significant index of the economic status of women in Roman Egypt.

¹⁷ For a list of these thirty-two documents, see Samuel (above, note 4) 392, note 9.

¹⁸ For a list of property registrations from Socnopaïou Nesos, see Samuel (above, note 4) 393, note 10.

¹⁹ These totals reflect the total number of people, without regard for the number of individuals involved in each document, or the distinction between buyer and seller.

²⁰ Socnopaïou Nesos census declarations are listed at Samuel (above, note 4) 393, note 11.

suppose that at least one-third of the village real estate may have been owned by women. A comparable figure is yielded by looking at the names of owners of contiguous properties found in the thirty property sales from Socnopaïou Nesos which contain such information: 41 names are male and 16 are female.

This figure of one-third, as a bare minimum and encompassing a long chronological span, can be corroborated by the evidence provided by nearby Karanis, a much larger and more flourishing village. The Karanis tax rolls from the years A.D. 171–74, published in *P. Mich.* IV, list people who paid taxes on private land in those three years; although the texts were published without commentary, and therefore any interpretation of the data provided by them is necessarily somewhat hazardous, it is worth noting that almost two-fifths of the names which appear among those paying taxes for privately-owned land are names of women. This statistic is useful for two reasons: first, since the Karanis tax rolls constitute a comprehensive list from a restricted time period, they provide a more accurate estimate of proportions of women property owners than any of the data from Socnopaïou Nesos, given that the latter embrace such a large time period. Second, the number of women land owners listed in the Karanis rolls points to the fact that Socnopaïou Nesos, with its apparently idiosyncratic economic conditions, was not atypical in containing a high number of female property owners, and further that women's property was not limited to village house ownership, but that women owned agricultural land to at least as great a degree as houses.²¹

Women's names occur often in connection with other forms of property as well: among 60 identified camel owners in Socnopaïou Nesos, twelve are women, which is a figure of one-fifth of the total.²² Out of seventeen attested slave owners, eleven are women, which represents almost two-thirds of the total in that category.²³ Thus the evidence for

²¹ Cf. O. Montevecchi, "Ricerche di sociologia nei documenti dell'Egitto greco-romano. III. I contratti di compra-vendita," *Aegyptus* 21 (1941) 144: in all contracts for sales of houses collected and discussed here, there are 195 men and 133 women. Thus 40% of contracting parties in house sales are women, a figure entirely consistent with the evidence presented in this paper.

²² There are three kinds of documents which provide information about ownership of camels: sales of camels, receipts for payments of the camel tax, and registrations of camels. A complete list of these three kinds of documents from Socnopaïou Nesos is given at Samuel (above, note 4) 394, note 15. The following documents from that list involve female camel owners: *BGU* I 87, *BGU* I 88, *BGU* II 416, *P. Amh.* II 102, *P. Lond.* II 333 (p. 199), *P. Grenf.* II 45a, *SB* VI 8977, *P. Lond.* II 304 (p. 72), *BGU* III 869, *BGU* I 266, *P. Monac.* gr. inv. 26.

²³ A complete list of Socnopaïou Nesos slave owners is given at Samuel (above, note 4) 394, note 14. The following documents from that list attest female slave owners: *BGU* III 805, *SPP* XXII 36, *BGU* III 855, *P. Lond.* II 311 (p. 219), *SPP* XXII 40, *P. Lond.* II 325a

ownership of houses, camels, and slaves all points to the fact that women in Socnopaïou Nesos owned a sizable amount of property, probably at least a third of the total.

The question is, what is the significance of this phenomenon? Given that men's liabilities to taxation and liturgy were greater than women's, we might suspect that men put their possessions into their wives' names in order to reduce the size of their own estates, a practice which is common in our own society today. Indeed, it may be an implicit assumption of this sort on the part of scholars which has deflected interest in the subject of women property owners, since it has perhaps been taken for granted that the economic role of women in the life of the villages could not have been of any real importance. For this reason it is critical to determine whether the role of women is merely a mask for the economic activities of the men in their households, or whether women really did function in their own capacities and in their own financial interests.

The evidence of the papyri I have examined indicates that women's possessions were indeed their own, and that the basis of their economic position was their right to share in the property of their families through dowry or inheritance. This is suggested in the first instance by two aspects of the statistics derived from the Socnopaïou Nesos documents. First of all, among sales of houses, women appear more frequently as sellers (19 times) than as buyers (11 times), whereas men appear more frequently as buyers (17 times) than as sellers (13 times). I think this disparity indicates that women operate more conservatively on the property market than men; they may sell property which they have inherited,²⁴ but they are less likely than men to invest in new properties.²⁵

A further indication of a more restricted level of economic activity on the part of women than among men is that women occur much less frequently in documents involving capital than in those involving real estate. Among loan contracts we find 24 women (9 as lenders, 15 as borrowers), as contrasted with 103 men (34 lenders, 69 borrowers).²⁶

(p. 106), *BGU* II 467, *P. Grenf.* II 59, *BGU* II 630, *SPP* XX 30. There is in addition a female slave owner in *P. Berol. inv.* 6988 (ed. Sijpesteijn/Poethke) of A.D. 139.

²⁴ As, e.g., *SB* V 8950, *P. Ryl.* II 162, *SB* X 10571, where the properties involved are specifically stated to have been inherited from a mother or father, or *P. Ryl.* II 160a, *BGU* I 184, *BGU* XI 2095, where a group of siblings sells a jointly-owned property, therefore presumably one inherited from a parent.

²⁵ Although see, e.g., *BGU* III 854 and *BGU* I 350 where the woman buyer also owns an adjoining property.

²⁶ The following is a list of loans and loan repayments from Socnopaïou Nesos from the Roman period. Documents involving women lenders are indicated +, women borrowers are indicated *. It should be noted that the large figures for men derive from documents where a number of men borrow or lend collectively, as, e.g., *P. Lond.* II 336 (p. 221) where five priests from Socnopaïou Nesos take a loan together. The fact that women rarely act collectively whereas men do quite often is another indication that women are

Furthermore, almost half of the documents in which women borrow money have the loan secured against a real estate holding, whereas this form of security is rarely offered by male borrowers.²⁷ This might indicate on the one hand that men were regarded as better credit risks than women, but on the other hand it also points to the extent to which women's economic role is directly linked to their ownership of real estate, which is the property they derive from their families through dowry or inheritance.

If men tended to transfer their holdings to the names of their wives or other female dependents, we might expect to find much higher percentages of women property owners, particularly among those buying houses and lending money, than we do. As it is, the numbers which we do find are large enough to point to the fact that women really did own a significant amount of property, but not large enough to cause us to suspect any falsification of the identity of the real owner.²⁸

Additional confirmation of the legitimacy and vitality of female property ownership is supplied by an examination of the marital status of the various women property owners at Socnopaious Nesos; the identity of the *κύριος* through whom a woman acts when she buys or sells property provides an indication of her marital status, since a married woman will normally have her husband act for her in legal transactions, whereas a young woman not yet married may have her father or a brother, and a widow will have her son or another male relative. If women's financial position were connected with marital status, then we should expect to find that women's economic activities varied in relation to their marital status. This does not seem to be the case. If we look, for example, at the

primarily dealing with their own inheritances, whereas men are perhaps involved in more impersonal business dealings. *SB* I 5244, *BGU* I 189, *SB* I 5243, *SB* I 5245, *BGU* III 911*, *P. Lond.* II 277 (p. 217)*, *P. Ryl.* II 326 descr., *PSI* IX 1051*, *P. Ryl.* II 160c*, *BGU* III 713, *SB* I 5110, *BGU* XI 2044*, *SB* XII 10804*, *P. Amh.* II 110, *SB* V 8952*, *BGU* XIII 2330, *BGU* XIII 2331, *P. Ryl.* II 327 descr., *SPP* XXII 46+, *P. Amh.* II 112, *P. Amh.* II 111, *P. Monac. gr. inv.* 32+*, *P. Stras.* IV 293+, *SPP* XXII 83, *P. Ryl.* II 174a, *SPP* XXII 78, *P. Vindob. Worp* 10+, *SPP* XXII 36*, *P. Lond.* II 308 (p. 218), *BGU* II 445+*, *P. Lond.* II 311 (p. 219)+*, *CPR* I 15, *P. Stras.* V 383+*, *BGU* I 290, *BGU* XI 2043/*SPP* XXII 45*, *P. Amh.* II 113*, *CPR* VI 3+*, *CPR* I 16, *CPR* I 14, *P. Lond.* II 322 (p. 209), *P. Lond.* II 336 (p. 221), *SB* VI 9369+, *P. Flor.* I 42, *SPP* XXII 69*, *SPP* XXII 76, *BGU* III 853, *P. Ryl.* II 334 descr., *SPP* XXII 41, *SB* I 7, *P. Ryl.* II 337 descr.

²⁷ Loans secured against property where the borrower is a woman: *P. Ryl.* II 160c, *SB* V 8952, *SPP* XXII 36, *BGU* II 445, *P. Lond.* II 311 (p. 219), *BGU* XI 2043. Those where a man is the borrower are *P. Vindob. Worp* 20, *P. Lond.* II 277 (p. 217), *SPP* XXII 41.

²⁸ On this point see Christine Doudna, *New York Times Magazine* Section (November 30, 1980) 55; in discussing the question of whether women in the modern corporate world use their sexuality to advance themselves professionally, she quotes Susan Meyer, executive director of Working Women's Institute, who comments that if you look at the small number of women executives, you have to conclude that "either it's not working or she's not doing it."

eleven property sales in which women are the sole buyers (that is, not acting jointly with either male siblings or husbands), we find a range of ages and statuses: in *SB* I 5117 the woman is probably not married, in *SB* I 5108, *P. Ryl.* II 160b, *P. Ryl.* II 160c, *P. Vindob. Tandem* 24, *P. Vindob. Tandem* 26, *BGU* III 854 the buyer is most probably a widow, whereas in *BGU* I 350, *P. Ryl.* II 162, *P. Lond.* II 334 (p. 211), *P. Amh.* II 97 she is a married woman; in *BGU* I 854 and *BGU* I 350 the woman also owns an adjoining property. This shows quite clearly that women were capable of independent economic activity regardless of marital status.²⁹

The conclusion which emerges from my analysis of this one particular village, namely that women appear to have owned, in their own right, a considerable amount of the real estate in Roman Egypt, is clarified by the information on inheritance practices which is provided by wills.³⁰ We have a large number of wills from Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Egypt—about 170 in all at this point—and an examination of the provisions in these serves to clarify the extent to which women benefited from their rights of inheritance.³¹ For the present purpose I will limit

²⁹ I do not share Pomeroy's view, (above, note 2) 315f., that a woman's economic independence is seriously compromised by her necessity to transact business through a *κύριος*. I take as the significant index of independence the clear identification of the woman herself as the owner of the property. On this point see Préaux (above, note 3) 141ff., esp. 143: "Si l'on fait abstraction de la présence du *κύριος*, on peut dire que la femme grecque, comme la femme égyptienne, a une capacité juridique très étendue." A good discussion of the economic authority of the *κύριος* is given by Schaps (above, note 11) ch. 4.

³⁰ Although it is true that women derived some immovable property from dowries as well as from wills, dowry documents do not afford a ground for comparison between the property acquired by men and that acquired by women in a single division, and thus they cannot be used to assess the relative economic positions of men and women with respect to family property. In any case, it seems clear from the evidence that women received far less immovable property from dowries than from wills: see O. Montevecchi, "Ricerche di sociologia nei documenti dell'Egitto greco-romano. II. I contratti di matrimonio e gli atti di divorzio." *Aegyptus* 16 (1936) 3–83, esp. 49f. Among 57 contracts of marriage of the Roman period listed on pp. 4–6, only nine contain a gift of real property as part of the dowry.

³¹ The *locus classicus* on the subject of wills in Greco-Roman Egypt remains O. Montevecchi, "Ricerche di sociologia nei documenti dell'Egitto greco-romano. I. I testamenti," *Aegyptus* 15 (1935) 67–121. For the present purposes the technical distinctions between a will and a *donatio mortis causa* will not be taken into account, and I use the general term "will" to include the *donationes mortis causa*. For the basic literature on the latter, see, in addition to Montevecchi, H. Kreller, *Erbrechtliche Untersuchungen auf Grund der graeco-aegyptischen Papyrusurkunden* (Leipzig and Berlin 1919) 215–23, R. Taubenschlag (above, note 6) 204–7, E. M. Husselman, "Donationes Mortis Causa from Tebtunis," *TAPA* 88 (1957) 135–54.

The following is a list of wills and *donationes mortis causa* (abbreviated here as *dmc*) published since the appearance of Montevecchi's article. Those where the testator is a woman are marked +. *SB* X 10282 (176–70 B.C.), *PSI Omaggio* 5 (I B.C.–A.D. I), *P. Alex inv.* 352 (Roman), *P. Vindob. Tandem* 27 (*dmc*, I), *P. Fouad* I 33 (*dmc*, I)+, *P. Mich. V*

my discussion to those papyri which date from the Roman period, since this is the period encompassed by the documents from Socnopaïou Nesos which formed my point of departure. However, I must point out that wills of all periods contain ample evidence of the fact that women could and did inherit movable and immovable property of all sorts from the early Ptolemaic period through the Byzantine era.³² Although legal terminology and details of distribution may vary from one era to another, it is perfectly clear that the female capacity to own property was not confined to the Roman period, nor was it really more characteristic of one ethnic group than of another, since we find property (including land) owned by Greek, Roman, and Egyptian women alike.

When one first looks at the wills of the Roman period, one notes in the first instance that among the extant wills, 63 are those of men and 33 those of women; thus the proportion of women transmitting property among the extant documents, which is about one-third of the total, is in itself roughly comparable to the proportion of female property owners we were able to identify at Socnopaïou Nesos, and only somewhat smaller than the proportion of female landowners in the Karanis tax rolls.

Among the 63 documents where the testator is male, the variations are numerous, but there seem to be two common methods of property distribution, one in which the property is divided equally among all the children, whether they are male or female (as, e.g., *P. Oxy.* III 651, *P. Oxy.* VII 1034, *P. Hamb.* I 73, *SB* I 4322, *CPR* VI 1), and another where the eldest son gets a double portion and the rest is divided among the remaining siblings (as in, e.g., *BGU* I 86 = *MChr* 306, *P. Mich.*

321 (division of property, A.D. 42), *P. Mich.* VII 437 (II), *SB* VIII 9642 # 6 (*dmc*, II), *P. Wisc.* I 13 (II)+, *P. Mich.* IX 549 (A.D. 117/18)+, *SB* VIII 9642 #1 (*dmc*, A.D. 104)+, *P. Mil. Vogl.* IV 209 (A.D. 108), *SB* VIII 9642 #4 (*dmc*, Hadrian), *SB* VIII 9642 #2 (*dmc*, A.D. 123), *SB* X 10572 (*dmc*, A.D. 126), *SB* VIII 9642 #3 (*dmc*, A.D. 125), *SB* X 10756 (A.D. 133)+, *P. Oxy.* XXXVIII 2857 (A.D. 134), *SB* VI 9377 (*dmc*, A.D. 138), *SB* VIII 9642 #5 (*dmc*, Antoninus), *P. Mich.* VIII 439 (A.D. 147), *P. Stras.* IV 546 (ca. A.D. 155), *P. Mert.* III 105 (*dmc*, A.D. 164)+, *SB* V 7816 (A.D. 166/7)+, *P. Lund.* VI 6 (A.D. 190/1)+, *P. Mich.* VII 453 (III), *P. Oxy.* XXVII 2474 (III), *P. Stras.* IV 277 (III), *P. Lugd. Bat.* XIII 14 (III), *P. Coll. Youtie* I 64 (A.D. 211), *P. Oxy.* XXII 2348 (A.D. 224), *P. Princ.* II 38 (A.D. 264)+, *SB* V 8265 (IV), *P. Athen.* 31 (V/VI), *P. Oxy.* XX 2283 (A.D. 586), *P. Michael.* 53 (VI), *P. Ness.* 115 (VI), *P. Ness.* 116 (VI), *P. Ness.* 117 (VI/VII).

³² The following are wills of the Ptolemaic period in which property (including land, where specified) was left to women: *P. Petr.* III 1, col. ii (238 B.C.; plots of land are left to two different women), *P. Petr.* III 7 (238/7 B.C.), *P. Petr.* III 6a.16–47 (237 B.C.), *P. Petr.* III 2 (237 B.C.), *P. Petr.* III 13a.1–19 (235 B.C.), *P. Petr.* III 13a.20–28 (235 B.C.), *P. Petr.* I 17.2 + *P. Petr.* III 17b (236/5 B.C.), *P. Petr.* I 18.1, left col. (235/4 B.C.), *P. Petr.* I 19.15–31 (226/5 B.C.), *P. Petr.* III 19c + d (225 B.C.), *BGU* III 993 (*dmc*, 127 B.C.), *P. Cair.* 10388 = *APF* I p. 62 (123 B.C.; 12 arouras of land). In most of these wills the testator simply leaves all of his property (τὰ ὑπάρχοντά μοι πάντα) to his wife.

V 321, *P. Oxy.* VI 907 = *MChr* 307).³³ The practice of giving sons a larger share of the estate than daughters is not limited to male testators; among wills of women we find examples of the same procedure (e.g., *SB* VIII 9642 #3, *SB* X 10756, *P. Oxy.* IV 837 descr., *P. Oxy.* I 104).

The wife is not usually bequeathed any of her husband's real property,³⁴ but provisions are often made for her use of the property and for her maintenance by the heirs so long as she remains alive and unmarried (e.g., *BGU* I 86 = *MChr* 306, *P. Oxy.* III 494 = *MChr* 305, *CPR* VI 1, *P. Oxy.* I 105 = *MChr* 303). Since wills provide information only about the possessions of the testator himself, we cannot know what property the wife may have had in her own name in each of these instances, but it seems likely that the husband did not ordinarily bequeath much property to his wife because she had her own property given in dowry or received through inheritance from her family. A husband's primary responsibility would have been for the maintenance of his wife during her lifetime, and this he provided in the terms of his will.

Although there are many variations among the individual papyri, there seem to be two basic principles governing the distribution of property in wills, and both of these have implications for the amount of property which passes into the hands of women. The first principle is that every member of the immediate family should be provided for as his or her circumstances require.³⁵ For this reason a wife does not need to be provided for if she has an estate of her own, whereas a widowed daughter with dependent children might need a generous provision (as is the case, one suspects, in *P. Vindob. Tandem* 27). Although there is certainly a tendency to give real estate to male children and household furnishings to females, this is by no means always the case. Of the 63 wills of men, there are only five (*SB* VIII 9642 #5, *SB* X 10572, *SB* VI 9377, *P. Oxy.* VI 907 = *MChr* 317, *P. Mich.* V 321) where the female child gets a portion which is inferior to that of the male child, and there are at least nine where the female child (as in *P. Oxy.* VI 1034, *P. Vindob. Tandem* 27, *BGU* III 896, *P. Oxy.* I 105 = *MChr* 303, *P. Berol.* 7124) or in a few cases the wife (*P. Oxy.* III 493 = *MChr* 307, *P. Oxy.* III 489, *P. Gron.* 10, *P. Oxy.* XXXVIII 2857) gets the bulk of the estate. In the remaining documents (where the text is sufficiently preserved to provide such information) either the children are male, or the gender of the children is unspecified in the will.

³³ On this point see Montevocchi (above, note 31) 102ff.

³⁴ Although there are a few instances where the wife is the primary heir (see below, note 35).

³⁵ An interesting example (though perhaps it is to the contrary) is found in the will of one Aurelia Serenilla, *P. Princ.* II 38, where her two sons are specifically disinherited, and the estate is left to the testator's mother.

In sum, then, though it might have been a general practice that, all other things being equal, the eldest son got the largest portion of the estate, and that if every family consisted of two sons and a daughter, you might find that women would inherit much less property than men, the fact is that not every family had male children,³⁶ and the second general principle which seems to have governed distribution of property was that the property should remain within the immediate family if possible. So if there were no male children in a family, the females inherited the property, and this must have happened in a considerable number of cases. Furthermore, since women retained control over their own property and disposed of it themselves, as can be seen from the fact that over one-third of the wills of the Roman period are those of women, their identities as property owners remained intact through the transmission of their own properties.

The application of these two general principles, that every member of the family be appropriately provided for, and that property be retained within the immediate family, would have resulted in women coming into possession of a significant amount of property in Roman Egypt. However, since they were given property—and particularly real estate—only secondarily in many cases (that is, all other things being equal, the male child was somewhat more likely to inherit real estate than the female), their capacity to inherit landed property was, in actual practice, not entirely equal to that of men. This may be why we find that women seem to have owned only a third of the real estate in a village like Socnopaïou Nesos. So when we reconsider our statistics from this one small village in the light of the broader spectrum of evidence provided by wills from the whole country, we obtain confirmation for the hypothesis that the economic role of women in Roman Egypt was indeed genuine, as far as it went, but that it derived quite directly from the female right to share in the property of her own family by dowry and inheritance, and probably did not extend much beyond that.

³⁶ On this point see E. A. Wrigley, "Fertility Strategy for the Individual and the Group," in *Historical Studies of Changing Fertility*, ed. C. Tilly (Princeton 1978) 137ff., where it is convincingly demonstrated (Table 3-1) that in a society with a more or less stationary population (which is generally the case with preindustrialized societies like Roman Egypt), about 20% of families will have no heir at all, 20% will have at least one female but no male heir, and 60% will have at least one male heir.

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THE REPRESENTATION OF YOUNG MALES IN 'FAYUM PORTRAITS'*

By DOMINIC MONTSERRAT

This article discusses the symbolism used on the mummy portraits of adolescent boys from Roman Egypt. The social implications of these symbols and representational modes are examined, with particular reference to their links with contemporary constructs of puberty, male sexuality and rebirth.

'PORTRAITS reflect social realities. Their imagery combines the conventions of behaviour and appearance appropriate to the members of a society at a particular time, as defined by categories of age, gender...social and civic status and class. The synthetic study of portraiture requires some sensitivity to the social implications of its representational modes, to the documentary value of art works as aspects of social history, and to the subtle interaction between social and artistic conventions.'¹

Richard Brilliant was talking about portraiture in general, but here I shall examine only one category within a well-defined corpus of portraits: that of the one thousand or so funerary images painted at different places all over Egypt between the early first and the fourth centuries A.D., conventionally (and rather misleadingly) referred to as 'Fayum portraits' or 'mummy portraits'. Recent scholarship on these paintings typically pays little attention to their social context or their status as products of the multi-cultural society of imperial Egypt: the debate has tended either to centre on art historical questions, such as dating and the possibility of isolating specific artists and schools, or on the function of the portraits within contemporary cultic and religious practice. For example, Klaus Parlasca's magisterial works² on the portraits discuss them without any reference to contemporary historical sources from Egypt, and a recent German dissertation on the subject,³ which proposes an extensive redating based on the hair-styles, says comparatively little about the social aspects of the paintings, in spite of the analysis of their 'kulturelle Bedeutung' implicit in the thesis title. Instead of looking at them *in vacuo*, an appreciation of the broader context in which the 'Fayum portraits' were created might help to answer some of the unresolved questions about their usage and iconography. Here I want to examine what one particular type of portrait, that of the adolescent male, might have to tell us about social constructs of puberty and masculinity in Roman Egypt, and what the appearance of such

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¹ R. Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Harvard, 1991), 11.

² K. Parlasca, *Mumienporträts und verwandte Denkmäler* (Wiesbaden, 1966), henceforward Parlasca (1966), and the three volumes of *Repertorio d'arte dell'Egitto greco-romano, Serie B, 1: Ritratti di mummie* (Palermo, 1969-80, with a fourth volume in press), henceforward Parlasca 1-III.

³ B. E. Müller (now Borg), *Mumienporträts: Ihre Datierung und kulturelle Bedeutung im kaiserzeitlichen Ägypten* (PhD thesis, Göttingen, 1990).

iconography on a funerary portrait might imply. This is intended as a sort of test case for Brilliant's reflected 'social realities' and 'social implications of...representational modes' which might be applied usefully to other portrait types within the genre. What 'social realities,' if any, do these paintings actually reflect?

To represent their subjects, the artists of the 'Fayum portraits' used a narrow repertory of iconography and forms, within which there was comparatively little variation of type: child with youth-lock, young bejewelled woman, soldier with studded buckler, etc. These painters had an extremely limited amount of space to convey much important information about their subjects—only the extent of the head and shoulders, on a piece of wood roughly 15 × 30 cm. The painters' task was not merely to create a recognisable likeness of a person, but also to create a likeness that would define the position of the deceased within the familial ancestor-cult and ensure his vitality for rebirth and life in the next world. It seems likely that in the Roman period mummies could be kept on display for some time after death,⁴ and were visited on certain days as part of the cult of the dead.⁵ The departed continued to play a part in society: the Egyptians did not shut out their dead from the society of the living by rituals of exclusion, and so funerary portraits would need to express, among other things, the social role played by the deceased person in his lifetime. Hence it would have been necessary for the portraits to display an array of visual symbols immediately comprehensible to somebody looking at the painting on the mummy (perhaps several generations after death, when the deceased person had been forgotten as an individual) as it was stored upright in a funerary chapel. The decoration and symbolism employed in the chapel and on the mummy itself, of which the portrait likeness was only one element, worked together to provide the most appropriate and effective setting for the rebirth of their owner into the next world. Because 'the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived',⁶ these symbols would primarily need to express sex, social status and age category. The latter was particularly important for males who had died at liminal stages in their lives: the pre-adolescent, 'untimely dead' (*ἄωρος*), and the adolescent, dead at the peak of his physical and sexual vigour 'just with his first beard, about to summon Love to his nuptial chamber' (*ἄρτι γενειάσκων... ἄρτι δ' ἔρωτας ἐς θαλάμους καλέων*).⁷

Therefore it is unsurprising that one of the most clearly differentiated portrait types is that of the adolescent⁸ male, post-pubertal and with a slight downy moustache, sometimes little more than 'peach fuzz',⁹ sometimes rather fuller (pl. XXII, 1 = Parlasca 1, no. 53).

⁴ Herodotus (II.86.7) and Polybius (I 93.10) both refer to bodies being stored upright in a special *οἶκημα*, perhaps a room in a funerary chapel. Other writers mention the Egyptian custom of keeping their dead alongside them: see, for instance, Xenophon of Ephesus, *Ephesiaca* V.1.9; Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 24 (= *Patrologia Graeca* XXVI 968–9); Plutarch, *Moralia* 159b. Papyri, such as P. Fouad I 75 and P. Princ. III 166, also suggest that bodies were kept around to be viewed by the family. The archaeological data for the practice given by W. M. F. Petrie, *Hawara, Biahmu and Arsinoe* (London, 1889), 15 and idem, *Roman Portraits and Memphis (IV)* (London, 1911), 6–8 are not to be discounted.

⁵ See the bibliography given by D. Montserrat, *JEA* 78 (1992), 304 nn. 14–17.

⁶ M. Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London, 1973), 93.

⁷ *Anth. Pal.* VIII 122, 3–4.

⁸ In this article, the terms 'adolescence' and 'adolescent' are used purely in a physical sense to express bodily maturation, without any psychological implications. The most recent discussion of adolescence and its social meaning in the ancient world is by M. Kleijwegt, *Ancient Youth: The Ambiguity of Youth and the Absence of Adolescence in Graeco-Roman Society* (Amsterdam, 1991), esp. 51–73.

⁹ For the basic type, see Parlasca 1, nos. 51–4, 56, 59, 154, 158–63, 191. I am including the following portraits as a sub-corpus of portraits of adolescent boys: Parlasca 1, nos. 41, 50, 51, 53–7, 59, 64, 154–5,

About fifty such portraits in encaustic and tempera are known, though some damaged or heavily-restored paintings may also belong to the corpus. The subjects are usually clothed in plain white tunics (pl. XXII, 2 = Parlasca I, no. 59),¹⁰ but are sometimes shown bare-shouldered, perhaps implying total nudity (pl. XXII, 3 = Parlasca I, no. 163).¹¹ On their heads, they often wear leafy garlands, some of which are painted as part of the original portrait, others stencilled on in gold leaf after painting (pl. XXII, 4 = Parlasca I, no. 54).¹² These images constitute a group of portraits quite distinct from those showing males in the two age categories on either side of puberty: those which depict much younger, pre-adolescent boys (sometimes difficult to differentiate from females) wearing the lock of youth and other symbols of childhood,¹³ and those of older, fully adult males in their twenties who are frequently bearded. The ages of these juvenile, post-pubertal males seem to range from about fourteen to the very early twenties, with a slight predominance towards the upper age limit, and this has been confirmed by X-ray examination carried out on two mummies from Hawara equipped with portraits of moustached, garlanded young men. The body of a man now in the Manchester Museum (Inv. No. 1768 = Parlasca I, no. 160) was estimated to be aged about twenty,¹⁴ and Artemidorus, whose famous mummy is in the British Museum (EA 21810 = Parlasca I, no. 162) died when he was between nineteen and twenty-one.¹⁵ Not only on the mummy portraits, but also in the funerary epigrams from Roman Egypt composed to commemorate young males, is the deceased's state of hirsuteness used to express the stage in life he had reached. For example, the second century inscription of Sarapion¹⁶ says 'death's destructive destiny led the young Sarapion down to Hades, when he had just completed twenty-two years and was bearded for the first time, he who was charming and gentle to all men'. Sarapion's epitaph is particularly interesting, because his age is specified in relation to the extent of his facial hair. The term translated as 'bearded for the first time' (*ἀρτιγένειον*) certainly refers to a full beard rather than a small incipient moustache on the upper lip. If this inscription is to be taken literally, we may infer that a full beard was the sort of facial hair that a twenty-two-year-old man in Roman Egypt would have been expected to have. It is possible, therefore, that the portraits of young moustached men are idealisations of individuals who died at a specific time in their lives, when they were members of an important, socially-recognised age category.

In Roman Egypt, as in many cultures which practise infanticide, the mere fact of having being born into the society was not an immediate assurance of social membership of it; an individual had to be transferred from his unsocialised 'natural' state to culture by

157-8, 160-3, 166, 168, 172, 190; Parlasca II, nos. 287-8, 290-6, 324 (a 'shroud'), 352, 356, 470, 491, 495-6; Parlasca III, nos. 509, 540-3, 611-12.

¹⁰ E.g. Parlasca I, no. 162; Parlasca II, nos. 470, 491, 495-6; Parlasca III, nos. 540-3.

¹¹ E.g. Parlasca I, nos. 51, 56, 163.

¹² E.g. Parlasca I, nos. 154-5, 162.

¹³ E.g. Parlasca II, nos. 473-5; Parlasca III, nos. 621, 654-6, 658-65, 669-72.

¹⁴ A. R. David (ed.), *The Manchester Museum Mummy Project* (Manchester, 1980), 32.

¹⁵ W. R. Dawson and P. H. K. Gray, *Catalogue of Egyptian Antiquities in the British Museum*, 1: *Mummies and Human Remains* (London, 1968), 35. Of course, there is sometimes very little correlation between the portrait and the mummy inside the wrappings: see D. L. Thompson, *Mummy Portraits in the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Malibu, 1982), 14-15 and n. 16.

¹⁶ Published in *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 5 (1913), 166: τὸν δύο πληρώσαντα καὶ εἴκοσι πρόσθ' ἐνιαυτοὺς Σαραπίωνα νέον τε καὶ ἀρτιγένειον ἔοντα μοῖρ' ὁλοῇ θανάτοιο κατήγαγεν εἰς Αἴδαο μελίσχων πάντ[εσσ]ι καὶ ἥπιον ἀνθρώποισι.

ceremonies of social inclusion. These typically include rituals of initiation at puberty, which can involve 'cultural work upon the body, and their effect is to transform the natural body into a social entity with rights and status.'¹⁷ For the teenaged sons of the Hellenised élite in provincial Egypt, these rituals revolved around a public status declaration, in effect an affirmation of their membership of the paternal kin-group. This public status declaration or 'scrutiny' (*ἐπίκρισις* or *εἵσκρισις*) confirmed the boy's lineage and his inclusion in one of several privileged groups eligible for fiscal and other privileges: the 'metropolitan twelve drachma class' (*μητροπολίται δωδεκάδραχμοι*), 'the gymnasium members' (*οἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ γυμνασίου*), or the ephebate (*ἐφηβεία*). Written declarations of *ἐπίκρισις* or *εἵσκρισις* were usually made in the year when the declarant reached the age of thirteen or fourteen, thus becoming liable to pay the full rate of capitation tax. They state that the boy 'has entered into the class of thirteen (or fourteen)-year-olds' (*προσβάντος εἰς τρισκαιδεκαετείς/τεσσαρεσκαιδεκαετείς*) in a given year.¹⁸ I have argued elsewhere¹⁹ that these status declarations signify more than a mere bureaucratic formality to gain tax relief, and that they were one component of an entire *rite de passage* system whose other elements could include 'cultural work upon the body' in the form of shearing off hair to mark transition, and also celebratory garlanding and banqueting. The *epicrisis* festivities could take place in important public buildings, such as the Capitolium, the traditional scene of Roman *rites de passage*.²⁰ Formal enumeration of the boy's ancestry may also have played a part. Some *epicrisis* declarations, such as P. Oxy. XVIII 2186, list forbears going back as far as seven generations, and these lists may well have been read out aloud at the time the document was drawn up or submitted. Reading out aloud would have served to underscore the boy's own name, (which characteristically followed that of a grandfather),²¹ and thus his standing and affiliation in the paternal kin-group, 'since having a name is an institutional mark of social membership.'²²

The exact function and organisation in Roman Egypt of the other élite group for adolescents, the ephebate, is still unclear, as is its relationship to the Athenian body of youths with the same name,²³ and to the other selected social groups. As P. Oxy. IV 705 tells us, some boys of the gymnasial class could be enrolled into it after a further examination of suitability. The length of a boy's ephebic service is uncertain, but was

¹⁷ B. S. Turner, *The Body and Society* (Oxford, 1984), 204.

¹⁸ The formulae vary, depending on the city where the declaration was made. For the status declaration in general, see C. A. Nelson, *Status Declarations in Roman Egypt* (Amsterdam, 1979); for the various documentary formulae, *ibid.* 13–22.

¹⁹ D. Montserrat, *BASP* 28 (1991), 45–7 and 49.

²⁰ Servius, commenting on Vergil *Ecl.* IV.49, suggests that *ad Capitolium ire* was equivalent in meaning to donning the *toga virilis* and relinquishing the *bullā*, that is, giving up the attributes of childhood at a formal induction. In an unpublished third-century dinner invitation from Oxyrhynchus, forthcoming in a volume of P. Oxy., the celebratory banquet following a boy's *epicrisis* is to be held in the Capitolium. P. Oxy. XVII 2147, an invitation to a feast celebrating the garlanding (*στέψις*) of a son in the gymnasium at Oxyrhynchus, may be connected with a *rite de passage* such as an *epicrisis*, though A. K. Bowman has suggested (P. Oxy. XLIV 3202 introd.) that the coronation here marks a gymnasiarch's accession to office.

²¹ For this practice, see D. Hobson, *BASP* 26 (1989), 167.

²² Turner, *op. cit.* 204–5.

²³ For the significance of entry into the Athenian ephebate as a *rite de passage*, see S. G. Cole, *ZPE* 55 (1985), 233–6. Nelson, *op. cit.* 47–59, analyses the documentary evidence for the enrolment of youths on the *γραφὴ ἐφήβων*. On the basis of epigraphic evidence from Greece, Kleijwegt, *op. cit.* 101, surmises that 'during the Hellenistic-Roman period the ephebeia was an aristocratic institution deploying activities which introduced the ephebes into the world of citizens (= adults)', which is what seems to have been the case in Roman Egypt.

probably about two years, and the age at which he was inducted apparently varied. Most of the boys seem to have been enrolled when they were about fourteen, the age that traditionally demarcated the onset of male puberty in antiquity,²⁴ though P. Tebt. II 316 ii, 17-18 suggests that boys could be registered as ephebes when they were as young as seven or even three years old. This papyrus may suggest that membership of the ephebate was an honorific rank, and required little active participation; alternatively, registering a boy as an ephebe at the age of three may have had the same sort of function as putting down an infant boy for admission to a public school in contemporary England. We do know that at Oxyrhynchus the members of the ephebate engaged in gymnastic or athletic contests established by Septimius Severus and Caracalla,²⁵ which recall the kind of military education received by the boys in the Attic ephebate. Whatever the duties of the ephebes may have been after their induction, the act of their joining must have had a similar significance to the official reception of boys into the metropolitan twelve-drachma and gymnasial classes. Both marked a specific stage in the maturation process of individual boys and prepared the participants for gender-specific roles and tasks of importance to their own status and to the civic life of their metropolis. Both centred around a formal public declaration of lineage as an affirmation of inclusion, because of the responsibilities and privileges carried by the adult male role. Its importance is demonstrated by the fact that even after their ephebic service had finished, young men who had been members still identified themselves in terms of their former status (P. Tebt. II 316 ii, 1-9). If all these are among the 'social realities' of reaching manhood in Roman Egypt, how are such categories of age and civic status reflected in the portraits that were painted of this élite group?

Moustaches

The mummy portraits of young males draw attention to the most obvious external sign of maturation in males—the growth of facial hair. In Graeco-Roman antiquity, the first growth of hair on the chin and upper lip was taken as an indication of incipient puberty: the observation of Shakespeare's Beatrice, 'he that hath a beard is more than a youth, and he that hath no beard is less than a man'²⁶ would have been entirely comprehensible. A youth's slight moustache was a strong erotic focus for both male and female *inamorati* in Greek love poetry and Alexandrian epigram, and praise of youths with 'their first down more golden than cassidony' (Theocritus II.78) was a well-used literary topos.²⁷ Numerous epigrams from the *Anthologia Palatina* celebrate the dedication of offerings of hair at puberty. For example, in *Anth. Pal.* IV 156 a boy named Charixenus offers his first shaven stubble to the nymphs of Amaranthus, and is compared to 'a foal who has shed his first downy coat' (ὡς ἵππος χνοῦν ἀποσεισάμενος). Other Greek epigrams express the hope that by offering up their first beards, the donors will escape going grey, and thus retain a youthful, virile appearance into maturity.²⁸ For the writers of homosexual love epigrams in the *Anthologia Palatina*, the growth of the first beard and other body hair was

²⁴ See E. Eyben, *Latomus* 31 (1972), 683 and 695-7, with references.

²⁵ See P. Oxy. IV 705, 45-21 and P. Oxy. IX 1202, 5-7.

²⁶ *Much Ado About Nothing*, II, i.

²⁷ See the discussion and references in F. Buffière, *La pédérastie dans la Grèce antique* (Paris, 1980), 609-16, esp. nn. 13-19.

²⁸ *Anth. Pal.* VI 198 and 242.

a standard topos, signifying the end of the boy's availability for non-reproductive sex and his entry into the world of reproductive heterosexual relations.²⁹

Roman perceptions of adolescent facial hair seem to have been rather different, however: its appearance still signified adulthood, but a stronger emphasis was placed on its removal (only by shaving, not by depilatories, which were considered effeminate). The *depositio barbae* sometimes formed part of a maturation ceremony associated with the formal assumption of the *toga virilis*, but the emperors who formally shaved off their first beards and made dedications of them seem to have been well past the age of puberty. Augustus was aged 23 (Cassius Dio 48, 34.3), and Nero was 21 when the occasion of his first shave was marked by an athletic competition watched by the Vestal Virgins, his shorn hair being placed 'in a gold box studded with pearls, dedicated to the Capitoline Jove' (Suetonius, *Nero* 12.4). Caligula, however, deposited his first beard at nineteen (Suetonius, *Caligula* 10) and Augustus' nephew Marcellus 'first shaved his golden beard, having returned from the western war ... his country's wish was to send him forth as a boy and take him back as a man.'³⁰ Marcellus was then about sixteen and had just completed a term as a military tribune in Spain: the association of first military service with manhood and shaving to mark transition is interesting.³¹ In portrait busts of the early third century AD, the youthful emperors Elagabalus and Alexander Severus both appear with wispy moustaches and/or immature beards.³² Both acceded when they were about fourteen years old, Elagabalus in 218 and Alexander in 222. It is interesting that Elagabalus is shown moustached, since the ancient sources place much emphasis on this hairlessness to stress his androgyny.³³ Exactly the same kind of moustaches that appear on the statues of these two young emperors appear in contemporary funerary portraits from Egypt.

Conversely, there do not seem to be any purely Egyptian attestations of the wearing of moustaches by adolescents, which is unsurprising given the traditional Egyptian emphasis on hairlessness as a manifestation of physical and spiritual cleanliness. Furthermore, it would have been very difficult to indicate precise age categories within the representational canons of dynastic Egyptian art. The depiction of adolescent facial hair, therefore, suggests that we are dealing with a milieu in which the dominant cultural influence is Greek rather than Roman. This does not mean, however, that hair lacked symbolic potency in Pharaonic Egypt, or that rituals surrounding its shearing and preservation were Hellenistic innovations. At least as early as the New Kingdom, hair appears in contexts strongly suggestive of life-crisis rites.³⁴ The showing of slight facial hair on the portrait of a young man, therefore, had a far wider symbolic value than might at first appear. It indicated that the deceased had died at a stage in his life when he was at his

²⁹ E.g. *Anth. Pal.* XII, 10, 12, 24-7, 30, 31, 35, 36, 191, 195, 220, 229; see also *Anth. Pal.* VIII 122, 3-4.

³⁰ *Anth. Pal.* VI 161; see also R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1986), 348.

³¹ The relationship between maturation and military service in the Roman empire is discussed by T. Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* (London, 1989), 113-18.

³² See, for example, the head of Alexander Severus in the Cairo Museum (JE 27480: pl. 220 in Z. Kiss, *Études sur le portrait impérial romain en Égypte* (Warsaw, 1984)) and the heads of Elagabalus and Alexander in the Museo Capitolino, Rome (illustrated respectively in S. Wood, *Roman Portrait Sculpture 217-260* (Leiden, 1986), pl. xi and in W. Schindler, *Römische Kaiser* (Vienna, 1986), pl. 70.

³³ See SHA, *Antoninus Elagabalus* V.5; Dio LXXX 14.2; Herodian V6.10.

³⁴ The range of symbolic uses to which hair could be put in the New Kingdom is well illustrated by finds from the tomb of Tutankhamun: see my article on the treatment of human hair in the tomb of Tutankhamun (*GM*, forthcoming).

optimum sexual vitality and attractiveness, at least according to Hellenistic perceptions. It also made a statement about the social standing of the dead man as a Graeco-Egyptian who followed some Greek traditions associated with hair and puberty. Showing the moustache would have been one of the visual elements which helped to both idealise and eroticise the dead man so that he could be reborn in a perfect and vital form, in just the same way that Pharaonic tomb paintings can show a quintessential image or *simulacrum* of the deceased surrounded by erotic references.³⁵

A variant set of symbols indicative of the connection between male physical vitality and bodily resurrection is found on the so-called 'tondo of the two brothers', found at Antinoöpolis and now in Cairo (pl. XXIII, 1 = Parlasca 1, no. 166). The two men, both lightly moustached, ungarlanded and fully clothed, are flanked by golden figures of two syncretistic gods both associated with death and renewal: Hermanubis on the viewer's right and Osirantinous on the left. Osirantinous is crowned and naked: as Hugo Meyer has suggested, his nudity is neither incidental nor erotic, but characteristic of the ephebe that he had been in life, and perhaps has further associations of the renaissance of Hellenism and Hellenic culture in Egypt under Hadrian.³⁶ At the edge of the panel, by the pedestal of the Osirantinous statue, is the date 15 Pachon (early May). The younger-looking man on the viewer's left wears a white tunic, its right shoulder ornamented with a *gammadion* or swastika-like symbol composed of four Γ-shaped elements. This was later appropriated as a symbol of the trinity, the resurrection and of Christ himself,³⁷ but in pre-Christianity it also had phallic connotations,³⁸ making it an appropriate symbol for a context associated with death and rebirth. All in all, the Antinoöpolis tondo is an anomaly within the corpus of funerary portraits, and one wonders whether its unique format and array of symbols might commemorate something unusual about the two deceased men, such as the circumstances of death.³⁹

Naked torsos and garlands

There have been several interpretations of the naked torsos and garlands sported by certain male portrait subjects, whose ages vary. There are examples of fully-bearded mature males depicted with bare chests, such as the man in the Petrie Museum (UC 19610 = Parlasca 1, no. 211) and the complete mummy in Berlin (Äg. Inv.

³⁵ For a good summary of the function of erotic references and symbolism in Pharaonic tomb painting, see G. Robins, *DE* 11 (1988), 61–64.

³⁶ H. Meyer, *Antinoos: Die archäologischen Denkmäler unter Einbeziehung des numismatischen und epigraphischen Materials sowie der literarischen Nachrichten* (Munich, 1991), 255–8.

³⁷ On the *gammadion* in the portraits, see Müller, op. cit. 171–2, who concludes that it is merely an ornament; for its significance in Christian iconography, see A. Quacquarelli, *Vetera Christianorum* 18 (1981), 5–32 and 21 (1984), 5–25.

³⁸ M. Thorn, *Taboo No More: The Phallus in Fact, Fantasy and Fiction* (New York, 1990), 94.

³⁹ In the ancient world, the tondo seems to have been the format *par excellence* for portraits of the living, and the Antinoöpolis tondo probably did not start out as a funerary portrait as such, although it is supposed to have been found in a tomb and the gods depicted on it certainly suggest that its subjects are dead. One might speculate that Osirantinous appears on it not as a god of the dead or as a *deus loci*, but as tutelary deity of the 'blessed drowned'. The date on the portrait, 15 Pachon, does not correspond with any known Antinous festival, so it may refer to a date of death, as on a mummy label. Maybe both men were drowned on 15 Pachon and the portraits painted as a substitute for their bodies, which may never have been recovered. The tondo may then have been intended to hang in a house or a shrine to the family cult. The role of Antinous in the Egyptian cult of the drowned is interestingly discussed by J. Lindsay, *Men and Gods on the Roman Nile* (New York, 1968), 297–309.

11673 = Parlasca I, no. 204), but these men are never shown wreathed. Juxtaposed with nudity, the garland, with all its other connotations of athleticism and youthful vitality, would be inappropriate for an adult man. In her thesis,⁴⁰ Lorelei Corcoran argued convincingly that the nudity apparently indicated by the bare chest was consistent with the 'heroisation' of the deceased: in other words, the giving of divine/heroic attributes to the dead man in order to expedite the process of his rebirth. Parlasca had rejected the possibility that the nudity of males in this group of portraits could be an attempt at heroic idealisation,⁴¹ because he believed that the portraits were painted from life, which would preclude a posthumous deification. Corcoran was attempting to prove that the portraits had a commemorative cultic function, 'perhaps the initiation of the living individual into the [Isiac] cult and his resultant assimilation to the sun-god', and suggested that male nudity was 'an allusion to the rebirth which the individuals had experienced as a result of initiation into the Isiac cult.'⁴² I would suggest a different interpretation: that garlands in conjunction with nakedness could be another reference linking the deceased with the ephebate. In Greek literature of the Roman period garlands, along with the chlamys and petasus, are the ephebic symbols *par excellence*. Heliodorus, for instance, (*Aethiopica* 1.10) refers to them being worn by processions of ephebes, and both Plutarch (*Pelopidas* 33.5.2) and Polybius (*Hist.* 30.25.12) mention golden garlands as being part of ritual ephebic dress. Young garlanded ephebes were also the subjects of erotic elegies (e.g. *Anacreontea* 1.42, 3-5, *Ath. Pal.* XII 8). One is immediately reminded of the gilded wreaths added to some of the mummy portraits of young men (see pl. XXII, 1, 4). As part of her theory that 'the iconographic elements that decorate these mummies can be "read" in a logical and coherent sequence from bottom to top', Corcoran saw the garlands as having a closer connection with the crown of justification, 'the crowning touch to the visual statement that the deceased has become transformed and justified.'⁴³ I believe that this is too narrow an interpretation. Corcoran is undoubtedly right to say that 'the iconographic scheme of portrait mummies embodies traditional pharaonic concepts about the afterlife',⁴⁴ but what of the iconography of the portraits themselves? They incorporate elements alien to Pharaonic representational concepts, such as vestigial moustaches. Her hypothesis does not allow for the polyvalency of symbolism: a wreath on the head of a deceased boy in a portrait could quite conceivably have represented an ephebic garland, the Egyptian 'crown of justification', or the wreath of a symposiast enjoying his funerary repast all at the same time. Similarly, gold leafy garlands appear on other types of mummy portrait, including those of older, fully-mature men and young females, where they must have had different connotations. The iconographic scheme of the mummy has to be considered as an entity, not as disparate elements.

Comparable ideas of divinisation and heroisation are found on the carved niche decorations of tombs from Oxyrhynchus and Heracleopolis Magna, where male divinities appear representing the idealised characteristics of the male tomb owner. Men were not defined by marital status, as was the case with women, but by notions of manliness

⁴⁰ Lorelei H. Corcoran, *Portrait Mummies from Roman Egypt* (PhD thesis, Chicago, 1988), 165-6.

⁴¹ Parlasca (1966), 41.

⁴² Corcoran op. cit. 175 and 165-6.

⁴³ L. H. Corcoran, 'A Cult Function for the so-called Faiyum Mummy Portraits?', in J. H. Johnson (ed.), *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society: Egypt from Cambyes to Constantine and Beyond* (Chicago, 1992), 58.

⁴⁴ Corcoran, *ibid.*

(*εὐανδρία*), and thus Apollo, Dionysus and Heracles, the gods associated with the gymnasium, are the only ones who appear.⁴⁵ This idea finds some confirmation in contemporary Egyptian funerary inscriptions: for instance, the stela of the teenage Dioscorus describes him as a 'son of Greece, skilled in music, a youthful Heracles' ('Ελλάδος υἱόν, τὸν σοφὸν ἐν Μούσαις καὶ νέον Ἡρακλέα).⁴⁶ The accompanying carving shows a well-developed, naked man praying with outstretched arms. The same iconographic reasoning might be applied to the bare-shouldered, gold-wreathed adolescents of the 'Fayum portraits', just as the attributes on Dioscorus' stela identify him with athletic young manhood generally, but more specifically with the gymnasium. Portraying the deceased with athletic or ephebic attributes would define him as a member of an élite social group at his physical peak, and thus in the best state to be reborn.

All this discussion of symbolism and élite groups prompts the question of whether the portraits of boys with the attributes of burgeoning manhood were actually prepared for high-status individuals. Which stratum of society in Roman Egypt employed artists to paint portraits of their deceased sons? This is not easy to establish with any certainty. Of course, the portrait was only one part of the whole funerary ensemble, which in its fullest form would have required the preservation of the body, enormous quantities of linen for the wrappings, a tomb, a funerary procession with hired mourners, sacrifices and a funerary banquet, among other things. As the accounts of Herodotus (II.87) and Diodorus Siculus (I.91) show, money determined the different standards of burial, and would presumably also have dictated the quality of the mummy portrait. SPP XXII 56, a third-century account of burial expenditure from Socnopaïou Nesos, suggests that the portrait was not a particularly expensive commodity: in this case, only half as much money (64 drachmas) was spent on the portrait as on linen for the wrappings (136 drachmas 24 obols), which represents nearly a third of the total cost of the funeral (440 drachmas 16 obols).⁴⁷ The greatest outlay on any single item of burial equipment was probably on the cloth for bandages, and the elaborate external wrappings, wound into layered lozenge patterns and adorned with gilded studs, would have been an effective way of showing off the family's purchasing power. Few people could have afforded to buy up to 380 metres of high-quality cloth to envelop a body and then pay for the labour of three or more skilled bandagers to wind it around the corpse. The lavishness of the wrappings might well have been a better indicator of the income of the family than the mummy portrait. Most of the portraits of young males are now separated from their wrappings, but the two that still preserve them (Artemidorus in the British Museum and no. 1768 in Manchester, both from Hawara) are evidently expensively-produced mummies, and the wrappings of the Manchester mummy are of particularly good-quality fine linen. The demotic texts from the Hawara embalmers' archive distinguish between *νωγ*, 'fine linen (burial) raiment' of superior quality, usually provided by the family of the

⁴⁵ For an excellent analysis of the symbolism of male divinities, especially Heracles, on Egyptian tomb sculpture, see T. K. Thomas, *Niche Decorations from the Tombs of Byzantine Egypt: Visions of the Afterlife* (PhD thesis, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1990) I, 242–52.

⁴⁶ SB I 3990 (late third-early fourth century AD).

⁴⁷ It is uncertain, however, exactly what the items of burial equipment in this text are. The word often thought to indicate a portrait, *πρόσωπον*, more usually means a mask: but in line 23 a *προσωπίδιον* is mentioned, costing 14 drachmas, and one wonders why one individual would require two similar items. Maybe SPP XXII 56 lists expenditure on a double funeral (cf P. Oxy. XII 1535), or *πρόσωπον* is a term for some other commodity, perhaps another fabric item: a 'cover'? For the cost of portraits in general, see Müller, *op. cit.* 184–91.

deceased, and *hbs*, 'mortuary raiment' in general, presumably of poorer quality.⁴⁸ It is unlikely that the same quality of linen was used further down in the bandaging,⁴⁹ but there can be no doubt that a considerable amount of time, labour and expenditure went into preparing the young man now in Manchester for eternity.

The symbolic triad of moustache, garland and bare chest to indicate post-pubescent males finds its converse in the range of attributes used by the portrait painters to denote pre-adolescent boys. These boys are invariably round-faced and childishly chubby, they never have any trace of facial hair, and they wear one or both of the youth-lock and a cylindrical amulet on a cord around the neck.⁵⁰ These signs reinforce the status of the sitter as pre-pubescent and sexually immature, and thus socially marginal: a potential but unrealised adult. The youth-lock or Horus-lock was worn by children of both sexes and ritually shorn off at puberty, perhaps at a ceremony called the *mallocouria* or 'cutting off of the tress'.⁵¹ The amulet is reminiscent of the protective *bullā* and other apotropaic charms worn by freeborn Roman boys till the onset of puberty,⁵² but may well have closer links with the amulets of 'oracular amuletic decrees' in hieratic.⁵³ These texts, dating from the late New Kingdom, contain extensive invocations to protect the child's body from every kind of magic, disease and malevolent being: 'we shall keep healthy her abdomen. We shall keep healthy her pudenda. We shall keep healthy her rectum'.⁵⁴ They are written on long strips of papyrus and were worn rolled up inside some kind of amuletic case⁵⁵ that was presumably relinquished at puberty, since the spells promise to 'provide everything that is good for her ... and a happy childhood' and only later to 'conceive male and female children'.⁵⁶ We do not know the exact nature of the amulets or amulet-cases shown on the mummy portraits of pre-pubescents, particularly whether they contained any protective texts, though a portrait in the National Museum, Dublin (inv. 1902:4 = Parlasca III, no. 621) shows a small boy wearing a cylindrical amulet with a now illegible inscription on it. If the Roman Period amulets did contain some kind of spell, their inclusion in the portraits of pre-pubescents may serve both to illustrate the immaturity of the deceased and to provide symbolic magical protection.

Conclusions

'Ego adulescens, ego ephebus, ego puer'⁵⁷ says Catullus of the life stages of Roman élite youths; and the 'Fayum portraits' place their subjects in precisely this taxonomy which is,

⁴⁸ E. A. E. Reymond, *Catalogue of Demotic Papyri in the Ashmolean Museum*, 1 (Oxford, 1973), 63-4.

⁴⁹ It was standard practice to recycle old linen for embalming purposes: see SPP XXII 56, 16, where the other wrappings are padded out with an old tunic.

⁵⁰ E.g. Parlasca III, nos. 621, 654 and 672. For instances of this type of pre-adolescent portrait, see note 13 above.

⁵¹ For the *μαλλοκούρια* see note 19 above. Müller op. cit. 193-201, interprets the *Jugendlock* as a purely religious symbol connected with devotion to the Isiac cult.

⁵² On the *bullā*, see Wiedemann, op. cit. 116.

⁵³ Corpus of texts by I. E. S. Edwards, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, Fourth Series: Oracular Amuletic Decrees of the Late New Kingdom* (London, 1960).

⁵⁴ Edwards, op. cit. 9.

⁵⁵ For an interesting discussion of these cases generally, see J. J. and R. M. Janssen, in I. Gamer-Wallert and W. Helck (eds), *Gegengabe. Festschrift für Emma Brunner-Traut* (Tübingen, 1990), 161-4, with useful bibliography in nn. 23-36.

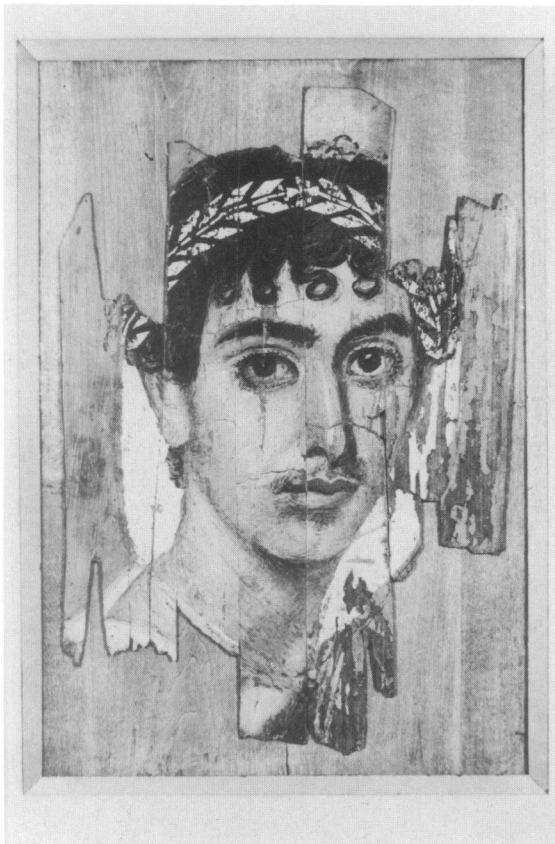
⁵⁶ Edwards, op. cit. 8 and 12.

⁵⁷ Catullus 63.63.

as Richard Brilliant says, 'defined by categories of age, gender...social and civic status and class.' The portraitists used a fixed repertory of symbols to indicate pre-pubescent males, adolescents up to the age of about twenty (of whom some may have been ephebes), and males over twenty. Thus, if the social milieu in which these portraits were created is taken into account, the attributes used in the portraits of young men may be seen as reflecting the system of age categories operating in Roman Egypt, the dynamics of moving between those categories, and the extent to which the categories were defined by both the body itself and social perceptions. Taken *in toto*, the three most common attributes of post-adolescents in the portraits—the slight moustaches, the wreaths and nakedness—would have been seen in Roman Egypt as strongly connotative of the thirteen/fourteen to twenty age category, the age when males were conceived as being at the apogee of their sexual desirability, and also the age at which élite youths underwent their formal social integration. These symbols would also have removed any ambiguity over the sexual status of the deceased. The moustache in particular represented these young boys unequivocally as post-pubescent males, and thus ready for fruitful, procreative sexual relations.

This article has deliberately refrained from addressing the vexed questions of whether 'Fayum portraits' had any function other than a funerary one, and whether or not they were painted from life.⁵⁷ In a sense, whether or not the young men actually wore moustaches is immaterial: this article has tried to prove that the social conventions of Roman Egypt rendered them an iconographic necessity on a funeral portrait. Depicting the deceased man thus would have helped in the process of ensuring that he survived after death to be reborn within the protective carapace of his mummy.

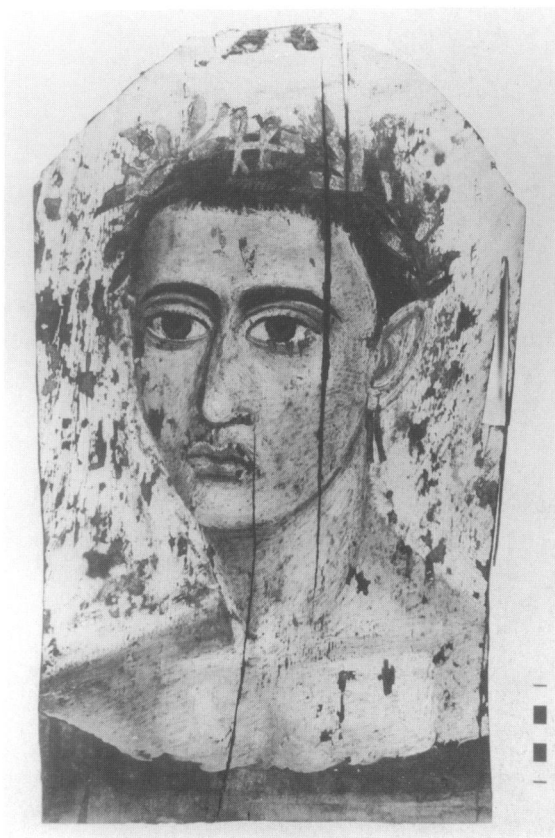
⁵⁸ A representative range of thought on these questions may be found in Parlasca (1966), 59–91, with older bibliography; Müller, *op. cit.* 152–7 and 192–232; Corcoran, 'A Cult Function', 59; D. L. Thompson, *op. cit.* 8–10, 14–15.



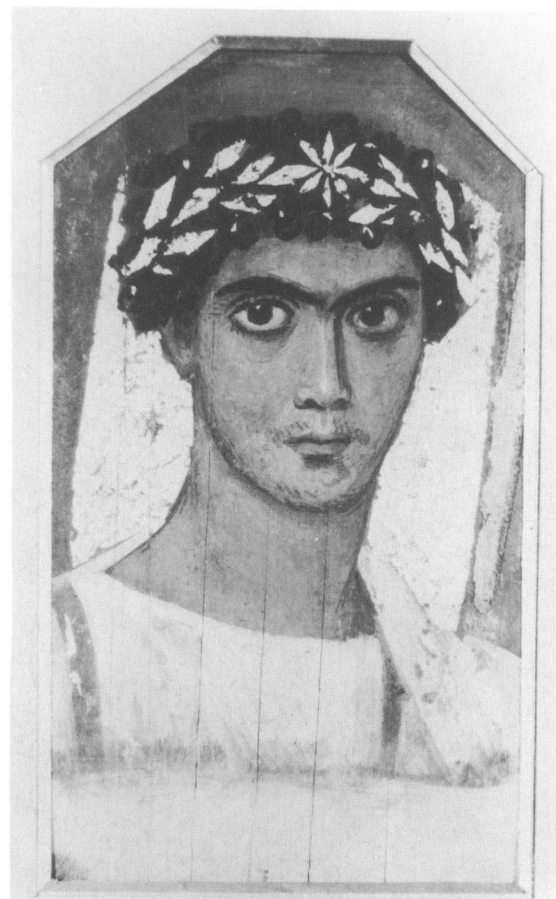
1. Moscow, Pushkin Museum, Inv. 5780



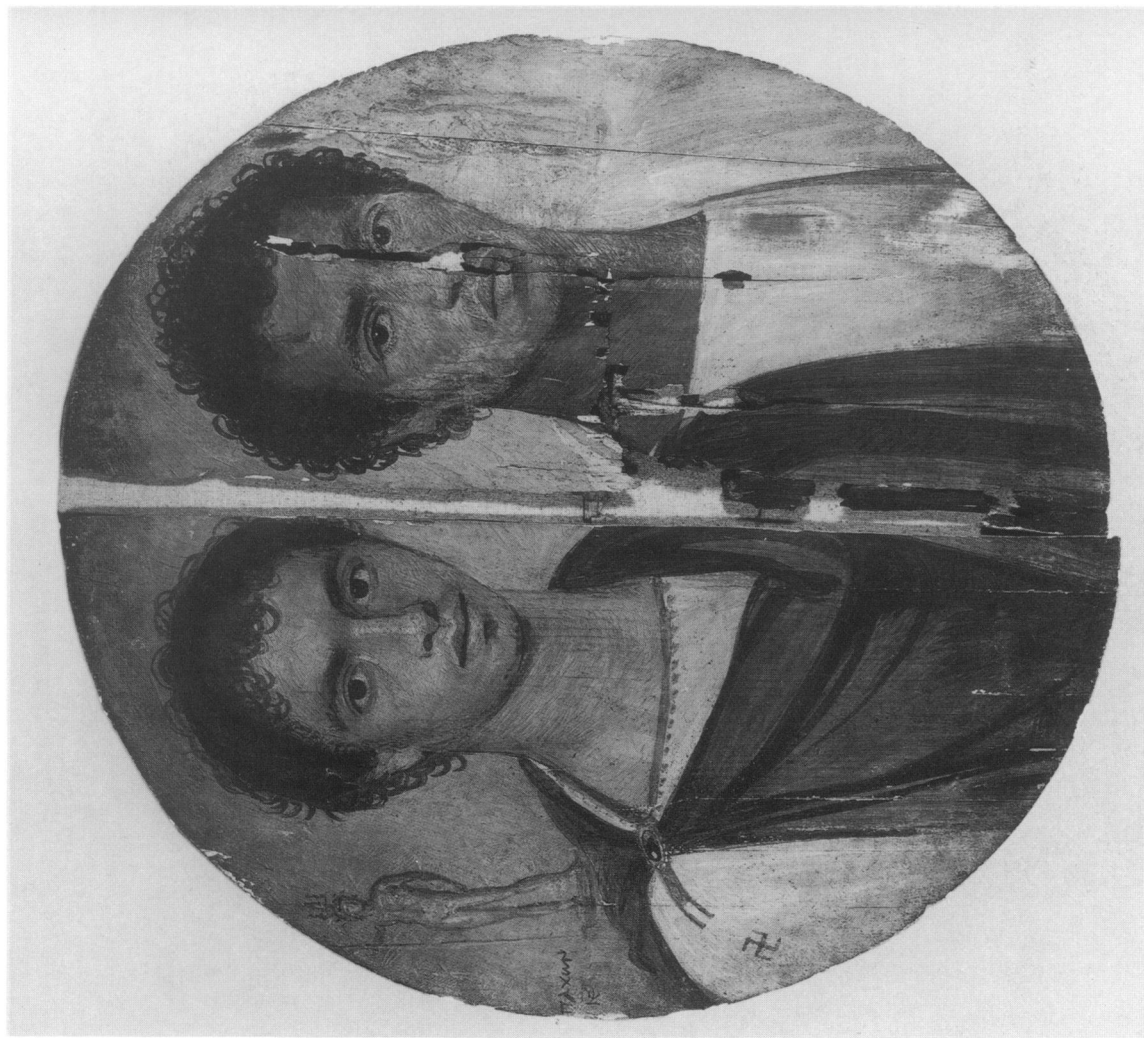
2. Cairo, Egyptian Museum, CG 33232



3. London, Petrie Museum, UC 19613

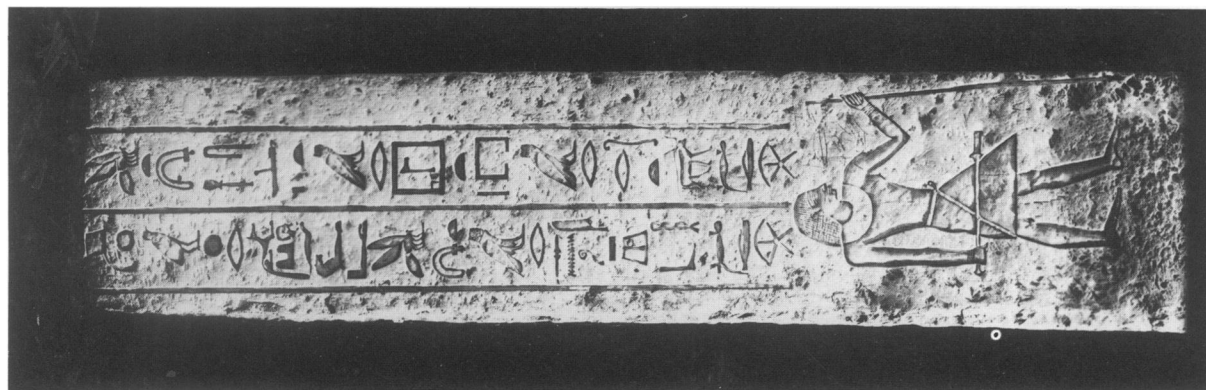


4. Moscow, Pushkin Museum, Inv. 5776

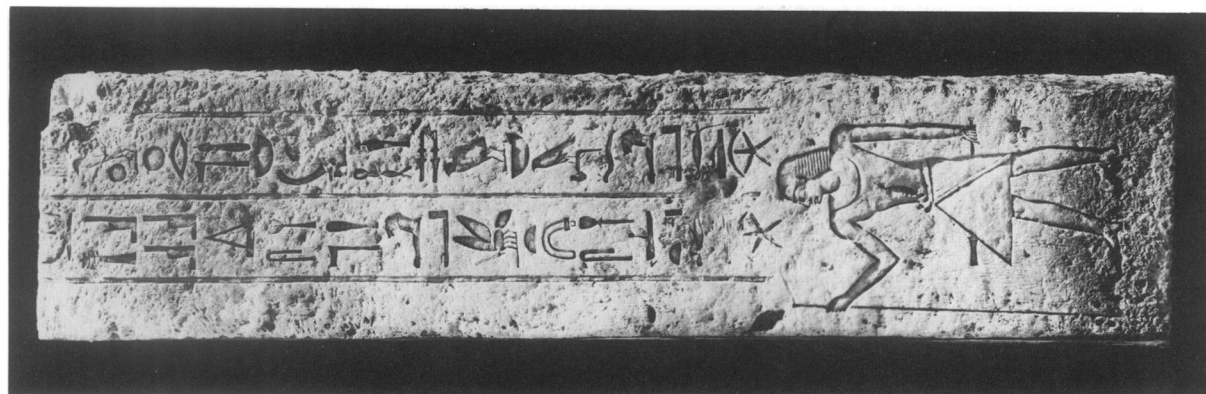


1. Cairo, Egyptian Museum, CG 33267

THE REPRESENTATION OF YOUNG MALES IN 'FAYUM PORTRAITS'
(pp. 215-25)



2. Left jamb



3. Right jamb

BLOCKS FROM THE TOMB OF SHED-ABED (pp. 243-8)



Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten

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Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten*

Beate Schukraft

Abstract

Es wird untersucht, was im Alten Ägypten unter dem modernen Begriff „Homosexualität“ verstanden wurde, und ob und wie diese Form der zwischenmenschlichen Beziehung gelebt werden konnte. Zu diesem Zweck werden Quellen ausgewertet, die sich über den Zeitraum vom Alten Reich bis in die Spätzeit erstrecken und die drei Ebenen umfassen, die religiöse-mythologische Ebene, die königliche Ebene und die private Ebene, welche jeweils unterschieden werden müssen.

1 Einleitung

„Sexuality cannot be abstracted from its surrounding social layers“.¹ Aus diesem Grund ist es wichtig, sich zu Beginn dieser Arbeit darüber klar zu werden, dass das Verständnis, welches wir von Homosexualität haben, nicht ins Alte Ägypten, Antike Griechenland oder Antike Rom übertragen werden kann und darf. Dass dies schwierig ist, steht außer Frage. Ich möchte also darauf hinweisen, dass man stets im Hinterkopf behalten sollte, dass bestimmte Verhaltensweisen einiger Personen im Alten Ägypten in unseren Augen der „Kategorie“ ‚homosexuell‘ angehören, dies aber nicht bedeuten muss, dass die Alten Ägypter dieses Verhalten auf ähnliche Weise einstufen und bewerteten.

Das Thema Sexualität wurde in der Ägyptologie lange stiefmütterlich behandelt. So ist zum Beispiel im Lexikon der Ägyptologie kein Eintrag zu diesem Stichwort vorhanden, sondern nur zum Sexualethos² und zur Erotik³. Und auch heute noch ist eine gewisse Zurückhaltung, was die Sexualität der alten Ägypter betrifft, durchaus spürbar. Es hielt sich sogar ziemlich lange die Einstellung, dass die Alten Ägypter keusch gelebt hätten, wie u.a. folgendes Zitat belegt: „Zum Ruhm der Ägypter sei's gesagt, dass sie keusch gewesen sind wie kaum ein anderes Volk“⁴. Eine zusammenfassende Arbeit zur Sexualität im Alten Ägypten wurde 1987 von L. Manniche vorgelegt⁵. Sie bildet weiterhin die Grundlage für Fragen zu diesem Thema.

Aufgrund des eben Genannten verwundert es wenig, dass über Homosexualität, welche in gewisser Weise ein Unterthema im Bereich der Sexualität darstellt, bisher wenig geschrieben wurde. L. Störk bemerkt in seinem Eintrag im Lexikon der Ägyptologie zum Thema „Erotik“: „Christlich-bürgerliche Prüderie führte in der Ägyptologie zu einer weitgehenden Verdrängung bzw. negativen Besetzung erotischer Phänomene, die allenfalls im Bereich der Reproduktion toleriert werden“⁶. Dass eine Reproduktion bei homosexuellem Verkehr nicht stattfindet, ist hinlänglich bekannt. Bis in die Mitte der Neunziger Jahre des letzten Jahrhunderts war die Scheu vor dem Thema Homosexualität so groß, dass es nur am Rande behandelt wurde, und dies auch nur,

* Bei dem vorliegenden Artikel handelt es sich um eine gekürzte Fassung einer Anfang 2007 an der Universität Hamburg vorgelegten Magisterarbeit.

¹ E. Ross/R. Rapp, Sex and Society, in: M. di Leonardo/R.N. Lancaster, The gender/sexuality reader: culture, history, political economy, 1997 (1981), 155.

² R. Schlichting, s.v. Sexualethos (-ethik), in: LÄ V, 919–921.

³ L. Störk, s.v. Erotik, in: LÄ II, 4–11.

⁴ E. Brunner-Traut, Die Alten Ägypter, 1974, 79.

⁵ L. Manniche, Sexual life in ancient Egypt, 1987.

⁶ Störk, in: LÄ II, 4.

wenn es zwingend notwendig war. Weitere Methoden zur Umgehung einer Auseinandersetzung mit Homosexualität waren kommentarlos, in einigen Fällen nicht einmal gekennzeichnetes, Übergehen bestimmter Textpassagen⁷, nur ungenaues Andeuten des Inhalts⁸ oder der Wechsel beispielsweise ins Lateinische, um den Zugang zu erschweren⁹. Erst 1995 behandelte R. Parkinson das Thema Homosexualität ausführlicher¹⁰.

Es gibt zwei große Probleme bei der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Thema Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten: Das erste Problem ist die Begriffsdefinition. Diese soll in Punkt 2 der Arbeit behandelt werden. Geklärt werden soll, was der „moderne“ Mensch im europäisch-amerikanischen Verständnis mit den Begriffen „homosexuell“ und „Homosexualität“ verbindet. Im Anschluss daran folgt eine Darstellung der „Homosexualitätenkonzepte“ im Antiken Griechenland und im Antiken Rom, da diese zeitlich relativ nah am Alten Ägypten liegen, auch wenn dieser Sachverhalt alleine nicht ausreicht, um bestimmte Verhaltens- und Sichtweisen übertragen zu können.

Das zweite Problem bei der Auseinandersetzung mit Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten stellt die mangelnde Quellenlage dar. Eventuell ist auch dies ein Grund dafür, dass das Thema bislang nicht zusammenfassend bearbeitet wurde. Die Belege werden vom Alten Reich bis zur Spätzeit sortiert im dritten Punkt der Arbeit aufgeführt, um im Anschluss daran, getrennt nach religiöser und mythischer Ebene, königlicher Ebene und privater Ebene¹¹ untersucht zu werden. Diese Trennung ist notwendig, da beispielsweise Götter einige Dinge ungestraft oder milde bestraft tun konnten, welche für private Personen und teilweise auch für königliche Personen nicht denkbar waren.

Die Quellenlage für das nächste Kapitel der Arbeit, den Umgang mit Homosexualität im Alltag, ist sehr dürftig. Es gibt nur wenig Belege, die etwas darüber aussagen, ob Homosexualität gestattet oder nur toleriert war oder vielleicht sogar unter Strafe stand. Ein weiteres Problem in diesem Punkt sind die manchmal nicht ganz klaren Vokabeln und/oder Übersetzungsmöglichkeiten einiger wichtiger Textstellen¹², so dass häufig persönliche Meinungen unbewusst oder bewusst wertend in die Übersetzung mit eingebracht werden.

Der weiblichen Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten ist ein eigenes Kapitel gewidmet. Bereits an dieser Stelle sei gesagt, dass ihr Auftreten im hinteren Teil der Arbeit keine Wertung darstellen soll, sondern vielmehr ein Resultat der Quellenlage ist. Es sei vorausgeschickt, dass es in der Zeit vom Alten Reich bis zum Neuen Reich keinen eindeutigen Beleg für weibliche Homosexualität gibt. Diese treten erst in der Spätzeit auf. Wenn im Folgenden also von Homosexualität gesprochen wird, bezieht sich dies, wenn nicht ausdrücklich anders erwähnt, nur auf homosexuelle Beziehungen zwischen Männern.

⁷ Auf diesen Sachverhalt weisen F. Kammerzell/M.I. Toro Rueda, in: *LingAeg* 11, 2003, 64 hin und erwähnen u.a. H. Brunner, *Altägyptische Weisheiten. Lehren für das Leben*, 1988.

⁸ Siehe u.a. M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature I*, 1973, 72: „This maxim is an injunction against illicit sexual intercourse. It is very obscure and has been omitted here.“

⁹ So beispielsweise bei F.Ll. Griffith, *Hieratic Papyri from Kahun and Gurob*, 1898, 4, der die Übersetzung des Streites von Horus und Seth auf Latein gibt.

¹⁰ R. Parkinson, „Homosexual“ Desire and Middle Kingdom Literature, in: *JEA* 81, 1995, 57–76.

¹¹ Mit „private Personen“ sind Menschen gemeint, die nicht zur königlichen Familie gehören, wohl aber im direkten Dienst des Königs gestanden haben können.

¹² So beispielsweise die 32. Maxime der Lehre des Ptahhotep, auf welche in Punkt 8.2 der Arbeit näher eingegangen wird.

2 „Homosexualitätenkonzepte“

2.1 Begriffsdefinition und Homosexualität in Deutschland

Unter Homosexualität verstehen wir eine „sexuelle Beziehung zwischen zwei Menschen des gleichen Geschlechts“¹³. Die Bezeichnung „Homosexualität“ wurde 1869 von *K.M. Benkert* (Pseudonym: Karl Maria Kertbeny), einem österreichisch-ungarischen Schriftsteller und Übersetzer, eingeführt¹⁴. Er verwendete sie in einem offenen Brief an das preußische Justizministerium, in welchem er die Ansicht vertrat, Homosexuelle seien „unschuldige Opfer ihrer Neigung“¹⁵. Vor dieser Zeit wurde üblicherweise die von *Ulrichs* eingeführte Bezeichnung „Urnning“ verwendet.

Die Bewertungen homosexuellen Verhaltens unterscheiden sich historisch und kulturell erheblich voneinander. Sie reichen im westlichen Kulturraum von weitgehender Tolerierung und Förderung, bis zu fanatischer Bekämpfung, von rein moralischer Verurteilung, in der Homosexualität als widernatürlich und sündig angesehen wird, bis hin zur medizinischen Beurteilung als krank und therapiebedürftig. Bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts galt in praktisch allen Gesetzeswerken für homosexuelle Handlungen von Männern die Todesstrafe. Im Rahmen der Aufklärung und der französischen Revolution folgte auf Gefängnis- und Körperstrafen eine weitgehende Liberalisierung¹⁶, die allerdings im Zuge des Scheiterns der bürgerlichen Revolution zwischen 1851 und 1871 zurückgenommen wurde. In der Weimarer Republik wurden Stimmen zur Abschaffung des Paragraphen 175, „Verbot ‚beischlafähnlicher‘ Handlungen unter Männern“, laut. Ab 1935 wurde dieser im Nationalsozialismus durch Erweiterung der Strafbarkeit auf alle homosexuellen Kontakte verschärft. In der BRD wurde die verschärfte Fassung bis 1969, in der DDR bis 1968 beibehalten. Eine vollständige Abschaffung der Strafbarkeit unter Erwachsenen erfolgte in der BRD 1974, in der DDR 1968. Am 16. Februar 2001 wurde in der BRD das Gesetz über die „Eingetragene Lebenspartnerschaft“ verkündet. Am 1. Januar 2005 trat das „Gesetz zur Überarbeitung des Lebenspartnerschaftsrechts“ in Kraft, welches homosexuellen Paaren eine standesamtliche Trauung ermöglicht. Es ist festzuhalten, dass Homosexualität unter Männer fast durchgängig härter bestraft wurde als Homosexualität unter Frauen.

2.2 Im Antiken Griechenland und im Antiken Rom

Das Geschlechterverhältnis war in allen Phasen der europäischen Antike patriarchal geprägt, die Ehe galt als fundamentales soziales Element¹⁷. „Eine grundsätzliche Frage, die vor der Beschäftigung mit dem Thema „antike Homosexualität“ der Klärung bedarf, ist die schlichte Verwendung des Begriffes.“¹⁸ H. Behlmer weist in ihrer Arbeit „Koptische Quellen zu (männlicher) „Homosexualität“ darauf hin, dass es weiterhin ungeklärt ist, ob es in der Antike Vorstellungen einer homosexuellen Disposition gab, oder ob lediglich homosexuelle Handlungen beachtet wurden¹⁹. Sie kommt zu dem Schluss, „dass die gesellschaftlichen Vorgaben, unter denen der Einzelne seine

¹³ P. Hertoft, *Sexologisches Wörterbuch*, 1993, 83.

¹⁴ D. Halperin, s.v. „Homosexuality“, in: G.E. Haggerty (Hg.), *Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia*, 2000, 450.

¹⁵ S. Dresler/C. Zink, *Psyhyrembel – Wörterbuch Sexualität*, 2003, 48.

¹⁶ Dresler/Zink, *Wörterbuch Sexualität*, 222: So wurde beispielsweise im Code Napoléon von 1810 erstmals in Europa Straffreiheit ausgesprochen.

¹⁷ Dresler/Zink, *Wörterbuch Sexualität*, 26.

¹⁸ H. Behlmer, in: SAK 28, 2000, 30.

¹⁹ Behlmer, in: SAK 28, 2000, 30.

Sexualität lebte, in der Antike und Spätantike andere waren als in der modernen Gesellschaft, in der auch die homosexuelle Beziehung letztlich noch vom romantischen Ideal der Liebe und Ehe geprägt wird.[...] Wir begegnen daher in der Antike Beziehungen, die von denjenigen Homosexuellen, die heute eine langfristig angelegte, gleichberechtigte Liebesbeziehung anstreben, abgelehnt würden [...]. Jedoch bedeutet das nicht, dass Menschen nicht eine auf ausschließlich homosexuelle Beziehungen ausgerichtete Lebensweise vorzogen.“²⁰

2.2.1 Antikes Griechenland

„[...] die griechische Kultur unterschied sich von der unseren insofern, als sie bereit war anzuerkennen, dass ein und dieselbe Person homo- und heterosexuelle Neigungen verspüren kann, und als sie ausschloss, dass eine Harmonisierung dieser gleichzeitig oder zu verschiedenen Zeiten auftretenden Strebungen des Individuums diesem selbst oder der Gesellschaft zum Problem werden könnte.“²¹ Homosexualität war im Antiken Griechenland weit verbreitet. A. Amenta fasst dies so zusammen: „Greek homosexuality was a common and socially accepted practice between two males: one of them, always the older, acted as active partner [...] and the other one, much younger, as passive partner [...] this sort of homosexuality was in fact usually practiced before marriage. Homosexuality between two adults of the same age was socially repudiated: the fact that a man already adult could act as passive partner was politically unacceptable.“²² Homosexueller Kontakt war ein Teil der Erziehung und Ausbildung, fand seinen Niederschlag in der Literatur und in der Kunst (s.u.).

Die Frage wie und wann Homosexualität unverschleiert praktiziert wurde, lässt sich nicht eindeutig beantworten, aber offenbar war sie bereits am Anfang des 6. Jahrhundert v.Chr. weit verbreitet²³. Welches homosexuelle Handeln im moralischen und ästhetischen Sinne als erstrebenswert bzw. als verwerflich galt, darüber geben uns eine Vielzahl von Quellen Auskunft. Es gibt jedoch eine Einschränkung: Bis auf einige Gedichte, die nur in kleinen Fragmenten oder als Zitate erhalten sind²⁴, sind die Werke der griechischen Kunst und Literatur von Männer geschaffen worden. Dies hat zur Folge, dass nur wenige Quellen vorhanden sind, zumindest verglichen mit dem Reichtum an Quellen über männliche (Homo)sexualität, die über weibliche Sexualität jegliche Art, und somit auch weibliche Homosexualität, Aufschluss geben können²⁵. Dennoch soll im Folgenden erst einmal die weibliche Homosexualität behandelt werden.

2.2.1.1 Weibliche Homosexualität

Wie gerade erwähnt gibt es sehr wenig Quellen, die sich auf weibliche Homosexualität beziehen. Dies kann zum einen daran liegen, dass es nur wenige, zumindest uns bekannte, Schriftstellerinnen und Künstlerinnen in der griechischen Antike gab, zum anderen liegt es aber mit Sicherheit daran, dass männliche Quellen gleich welcher Art zu diesem Thema fast ausnahmslos schweigen²⁶. *Dover*

²⁰ Behlmer, in: SAK 28, 2000, 31.

²¹ K.J. Dover, *Homosexualität in der griechischen Antike*, 1983, 11.

²² A. Amenta, in: GM 199, 2004, 13–14.

²³ Dover, op.cit., 11.

²⁴ Zur Dichtung der Sappho siehe Unterthema I. Weiblich Homosexualität.

²⁵ Dover, op.cit., 12.

²⁶ Dover, op.cit., 151.

geht davon aus, dass weiblich Homosexualität de facto tabuisiert wurde²⁷, weist allerdings auch daraufhin, dass es wohl regionale und epochale Unterschiede gab²⁸. In der klassisch attischen Literatur gibt es nur zwei Stellen, die auf weibliche Homosexualität hinweisen (könnten): Die erste findet sich im Alterswerk Platons *Nomoi* und ist die eher allgemein gehaltene Aussage „Männer mit Männern und Frauen mit Frauen“ (636 c).²⁹ Die zweite findet sich ebenfalls bei Platon und zwar in seinem *Symposion* (191 e). Hier leitet „Aristophanes“ das Wort „*hetairistriaí*“ von der Gattung der ursprünglichen doppelten Wesen ab, die nur weiblich waren.³⁰ Das Wort ist nirgendwo sonst belegt, bezeichnet aber „eindeutig eine Frau, die mit einer anderen Frau in einem der Beziehung von *hetairēsis*³¹ vergleichbaren Verhältnis steht.“³² Den stärksten Niederschlag haben homosexuelle Gefühle von Frauen bei Sappho, der berühmtesten und frühesten griechischen Dichterin gefunden. Sie lebte im ersten Viertel des 6. Jahrhunderts v.Chr. auf der Insel Lesbos und verfasste hauptsächlich Lyrik für den Einzelvortrag³³. Allerdings ist von ihren Werken nur eins vollständig³⁴, der Rest fragmentarisch in einzelnen Wendungen, Zeilen oder Passagen erhalten. Ein weiteres Problem ist durch die Tatsache gegeben, dass Sapphos lesbischer Dialekt teilweise Schwierigkeiten bei der Übersetzung bereitete, teilweise mehrdeutig oder widersprüchlich ist³⁵. Es steht jedoch völlig außer Frage, dass „sich einige von Sapphos Gedichten an Frauen in einer Sprache richten, deren sich männliche *erastai* gegenüber ihren *eromenoi* bedienten.“³⁶

Neben den genannten literarischen Belegen führt Dover zwei Stücke aus der darstellenden Kunst an: Einen archaischen Teller aus Thera, der zwei Frauen zeigt, die sich offenbar umwerben, und eine attische rotfigurige Vase, auf der eine Frau gezeigt ist, die eine andere Frau mit den Fingern an den Genitalien berührt. Wie im Folgenden zu sehen ist, mutet die Zahl der Belege über weibliche Homosexualität im Verhältnis zu der männlicher Homosexualität klein an.

2.2.1.2 Literatur

Die klassische griechische Literatur ist vorwiegend attisch³⁷, während die archaische Literatur fast gänzlich nicht-attisch ist. „Dies macht es schwierig festzulegen, wie sich etwa das Athen des Jahres 350 v.Chr. sowohl von ionische Städten derselben Zeit als auch vom Athen des Jahres 550 v.Chr.

²⁷ Dover, op.cit., 153.

²⁸ Dover, op.cit., 160.

²⁹ Dover, op.cit., 147, 152.

³⁰ Dover, op.cit., 152.

³¹ Dover, op.cit., 26: *Hetairos* ist das gebräuchliche Wort für „Gefährte“, „Kamerad“ oder „Partner“. *Hetairā*, die feminine Form, bezeichnete Frauen, die sich von einem Mann aushalten ließen. Die Beziehung war rein sexuell ausgerichtet. „In der klassischen Epoche scheinen das Verb *hetairein* und das Begriffswort *hetairēsis* nicht für eine *hetairā* benutzt worden zu sein, sondern ausschließlich für einen Mann oder Knaben, der in der homosexuellen Beziehung eine mit einer *hetairā* vergleichbare Stellung einnahm“.

³² Dover, op.cit., 152–153.

³³ Dover, op.cit., 153. Zu Sappho siehe außerdem: A.L. Klinck, „Sleeping in the Bosom of a Tender Companion“: Homoerotic Attachments in Sappho, in: B.C. Verstraete/V. Provencal (Hgg.), *Same-Sex Desire and Love in Greco-Roman Antiquity and the classical traditions of the West*, 2005, 193–208.

³⁴ Als Zitat eines Literaturkritikers der römischen Kaiserzeit.

³⁵ Dover, op.cit., 153.

³⁶ Dover, op.cit., 154. *erastai* = Liebhaber, *eromenoi* = Geliebten. Zur genauen Übersetzung siehe: Dover, op.cit., 24.

³⁷ Dover, op.cit., 13. Attika war das Gebiet des Stadtstaates von Athen. Es ist durch die erhaltenen Inschriften für die klassische Zeit weit besser repräsentiert als der Rest der griechischen Welt.

unterschied.“³⁸ Es gibt fünf wichtige literarische Quellen, die sich mit Homosexualität befassen. Diese sind:

1. Die spätarchaischen und frühklassischen homosexuellen Gedichte.
2. Die attische Komödie, besonders die Werke von Aristophanes³⁹ und seiner Zeitgenossen.
3. Platon. Vor allem in zwei Werken, dem *Symposion* und dem *Phaidros*, behandelt Platon homosexuelle Liebe und homosexuelles Verlangen.
4. Rede des Aischines *Gegen Timarchos*. Es handelt sich dabei eine schriftliche Fassung der Hauptrede der Anklage im Gerichtsverfahren gegen den athenischen Politiker Timarchos aus dem Jahr 346 v.Chr. Sie ist insofern von besonderem Wert, da sie das einzige literarische Werk der griechischen Literatur ist, welches sich im beträchtlichem Umfang (in einer modernen Fassung sind es 45 Druckseiten) ausschließlich mit homosexuellen Beziehungen und Praktiken befasst.
5. Homosexuelle Gedichte der hellenistischen Epoche.

2.2.1.3 Darstellende Kunst

Hunderte von Darstellungen auf griechischen Vasen und zum Teil auch auf Wandmalereien zeigen ältere Männer in der Unterhaltung mit jüngeren. Sie überreichen ihnen Geschenke, verführen, umarmen und lieblosen sie. Ein Großteil dieser Darstellungen ließe sich kaum eindeutig als homosexuelle Beziehung interpretieren⁴⁰. Die Skala der Liebesbezeugungen zwischen Männern auf griechischen Vasen ist jedoch sehr weit. Sie reicht von einem entspannten Gespräch auf der einen Seite der Skala über mehr oder weniger aggressives Werben um die Gunst eines Jünglings bis zur Darstellung mehrerer Männer oder männlicher Wesen im oralen und analen Gruppenverkehr auf der anderen Seite. Die meisten Vasen, die homosexuellen Verkehr und für das Thema Homosexualität interessante Dinge zeigen, stammen aus der Zeit zwischen 570–470 v.Chr.⁴¹ Zu der Zeit als Homosexualität in der Literatur reichlich behandelt wurde, nahm die Vasenmalerei bereits wieder Abstand von erotischen Themen.

2.2.2 Antikes Rom

„Ancient Romans lived in a cultural environment in which married men could enjoy sexual relations with their male slaves without fear of criticism from their peers; in which adultery generally aroused more concern than pederasty; in which men notorious for their womanizing might be called effeminate, while a man whose masculinity had been impugned could cite as proof of his manhood the fact that he had engaged in sexual relations with his accuser's son; in which men who sought to be sexually penetrated by other men were subjected to teasing and ridicule, but were also thought quite capable of being adulterers.“⁴² Dieses Zitat sagt viel über die Bandbreite von Homosexualität im Antiken Rom aus. Die ersten römischen Zeugnisse zur Homosexualität stammen aus dem 1. Jahrhundert v.Chr. Zu diesem Zeitpunkt werden sie noch nicht moralisch bewertet, solange gewisse Rahmenbedingungen eingehalten werden, die im Folgenden kurz wiedergegeben

³⁸ Dover, op.cit., 13.

³⁹ Dover, op.cit., 19. Von Aristophanes sind elf Stücke überliefert, die zwischen 425 und 388 v.Chr. entstanden sind.

⁴⁰ Dover, op.cit., 14.

⁴¹ Dover, op.cit., 16.

⁴² C.A. Williams, Roman Homosexuality. Ideologies of masculinity in Classical Antiquity, 1999, 3.

werden sollen⁴³. Homosexualität ist dann zulässig, wenn der Herr den aktiven Part, der Sklave den passiven „weiblichen“ Part übernimmt. In dieser Konstellation galt homosexueller Kontakt als selbstverständlich. Nahm jedoch ein freier Mann die „weibliche“ Rolle ein, oder zeigte äußere Zeichen⁴⁴ der Verweich- bzw. der Verweiblichung, die zu dieser Vermutung Anlass gaben, wurde ihm Verachtung und Spott entgegen gebracht⁴⁵. „Für einen freien Mann ist es generell eine Schande eine passive Rolle beim Geschlechtsakt einzunehmen, im homosexuellen nicht anders als im heterosexuellen Verkehr.“⁴⁶ Kurz zusammengefasst bedeutet dies: Der Mann ist der aktive, penetrierende Part bei der sexuellen Handlung. Ob der passive, penetrierte Part dabei von einer Frau, einem anderen Mann, ausgenommen sind an dieser Stelle junge, freie, römische Bürger, oder einem Sklaven eingenommen wird, ist nebensächlich⁴⁷.

Die Belege, die etwas über weibliche Homosexualität aussagen, sind spärlich. Es handelt sich dabei um eine Fabel von Phaedrus, einige Epigramme von Martial, einige Zeilen in einem Text von Juvenal und vereinzelte Abschnitte in Schriftstücken, die sich mit verschiedenen Themen wie Medizin, Astrologie oder Traumdeutung befassen⁴⁸. Aufgrund dessen wissen wir wenig bis gar nichts darüber, wie (und ob) homosexuelle Frauen im Antiken Rom ihre Sexualität ausgelebt haben und/oder wie diese Frauen von der Gesellschaft aufgenommen wurden. Und auch wenn versucht wird zu belegen, dass weibliche Homosexualität „kriminell“ war⁴⁹, so muss zugegeben werden, dass es nicht ein einziges Gesetz gab, in welchem weibliche Homosexualität genannt wurde.

Vom 2. Jahrhundert n. Chr. an verstärkt sich durch den zunehmenden Einfluss der Stoiker bedingt, für welche Homosexualität einen geringen Wert hatte, da sie diese als nicht der Natur entsprechend ansahen, eine Tendenz zur stärkeren öffentlichen Moral⁵⁰. Dies hatte eine Reihe von Maßnahmen zur Folge, u.a. eine rigidere Gesetzgebung gegenüber Vergewaltigern freier Jünglinge, die letztendlich dazu führte, dass auf diese Straftat die Todesstrafe stehen konnte⁵¹. Letztendlich wurde unter Justitian versucht, homosexuelle Kontakte zu unterdrücken, indem grausame Strafen darauf ausgesprochen wurden. Es muss noch bemerkt werden, dass im Zuge dieser Entwicklung die Unterscheidung zwischen passiver und aktiver Rolle aufgehoben wurde, indem Justitian von der Passivität als besonders strafwürdiger Eigenschaft abrückte und alle Vergehen „wider die Natur“ gleichermaßen unterdrückte⁵².

Ein Beispiel für Homosexualität in der Kunst der Römischen Antike ist der sogenannte „Warren Cup“. Dabei handelt es sich um einen aus Silber gefertigten Kelch, welcher auf beiden Seiten homosexuelle Darstellungen hat. Auf Seite A lässt sich ein junger Mann unter Zuhilfenahme eines

⁴³ Behlmer, op.cit., 33.

⁴⁴ Behlmer, op.cit., 34: Zeichen dieser Art sind z.B. das Tragen von für Frauen vorbehaltener Kleidung, Enthaarung des Körpers, Rasieren und Zupfen der Augenbrauen.

⁴⁵ Behlmer, op.cit., 34.

⁴⁶ Behlmer, op.cit., 34. Siehe hierzu außerdem: J.L. Butrica, Some myths and anomalies in the study of roman sexuality, in: B.C. Verstraete/V. Provencal (eds.), Same-sex Desire and Love in Graeco-Roman Antiquity and the traditions of the West, 2005, 211 und Williams, op.cit., 31 und 100.

⁴⁷ Siehe hierzu auch: Williams, op.cit., 7.

⁴⁸ Williams, op.cit., 238.

⁴⁹ Siehe hierzu: E. Cantarella, Secondo natura: La bisessualità nel mondo antico, 214. Angeführt bei Butrica, op.cit., 241.

⁵⁰ Behlmer, op.cit., 35.

⁵¹ Behlmer, op.cit., 35.

⁵² Behlmer, op.cit., 36.

Seils auf den erigierten Penis eines bärtigen Mannes nieder. Die beiden werden von einem Jungen durch eine Tür beobachtet. Auf Seite B ist ein junger Mann gezeigt, der einen Jungen penetriert. J.R. Clarke⁵³ betrachtet den „Warren Cup“ als eine Anomalie, da er die Regeln römischer Sexualität breche, indem er zwei Männer gleicher sozialer Stellung beim Geschlechtsverkehr abbilde (Seite A). J.L. Butrica hingegen sieht in dem „Warren Cup“ einen weiteren Beweis für die Existenz einer homosexuellen „Subkultur“ in der Römischen Antike⁵⁴.

3 Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten

Die Beleglage von Quellen, die etwas über Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten aussagen, ist äußerst dürftig. Insgesamt werden im Folgenden 22 Belege aufgeführt, bei dem Großteil handelt es sich um schriftliche Belege. Weitere Belege zu diesem Thema sind zur Zeit nicht nachzuweisen.

Aus den Quellen kann einiges über Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten geschlossen werden, jedoch bleiben viele Fragen offen und häufig liegt die Interpretation, beispielsweise einer Textstelle, wegen mangelnder Parallelen weitestgehend im Auge des Betrachters. Ein Beispiel dafür ist das Verb *hm* (*Beleg 17*). S. Schreiber übersetzt es mit „homosexuellen Geschlechtsverkehr ausüben“⁵⁵, im altägyptischen Wörterbuch ist es mit „eine verbotene unzüchtige Handlung“ verzeichnet⁵⁶, wobei in diesem Punkt mit Sicherheit auch das Alter der Literatur ein zu berücksichtigender Aspekt ist⁵⁷.

Es gibt in den schriftlichen Quellen Hinweise auf Menschen, die ihr sexuelles Interesse hauptsächlich auf Personen des eigenen Geschlechts richten. R. Parkinson weist jedoch darauf hin, dass es keine absolute Kategorisierung von Personen anhand ihrer sexuellen Orientierung gab⁵⁸. Ich möchte mich H. Behlmer anschließen und für die Untersuchung der folgenden Belege Homosexualität als „Ausübung sexueller Akte mit einer Person des gleichen Geschlechts“ definieren.⁵⁹

3.1 Belege

Beleg 1

Typ: Grabrelief

Beschreibung: Grab des Nianchnum und Chnumhotep, Saqqara

Datierung: Altes Reich, späte 5. Dynastie, Zeit des Menkauhor

Publikation: A.M. Moussa/H. Altenmüller, *Das Grab des Nianchnum und Chnumhotep*, AV 21, 1977.

⁵³ J.R. Clarke, *Roman sex: 100 B.C.–A.D. 250*, 2003. Siehe dazu auch: ders., *Representations of the Cinaedus in Roman Art: Evidence of „Gay“ Subculture?*, in: B.C. Verstraete/V. Provencal (eds.), *Same-Sex. Desire and Love in Greco-Roman Antiquity and the classical traditions of the West*, 2005, 271–298.

⁵⁴ Butrica, *op.cit.*, 236.

⁵⁵ S. Schreiber, in: D. Mendel/U. Claudi (Hgg.), *Ägypten im Afro-orientalischen Kontext*, Festschrift Peter Behrens, *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere*, Sondernummer, 1991, 333.

⁵⁶ Wb III, 80, 6.

⁵⁷ Der Artikel von S. Schreiber stammt aus dem Jahr 1991, während das altägyptische Wörterbuch 1926 bis 1950 geschrieben wurde.

⁵⁸ Parkinson, *op.cit.*, 57ff.

⁵⁹ Behlmer, *op.cit.*, 32.

Beleg 2

Typ: Pyramidentext 1036

Beschreibung: Pyramide Pepi I., Saqqara-Süd, Ostwand der Vorkammer, P/A/E 30–31

Datierung: Altes Reich, 6. Dynastie

Publikation: J. Leclant, Les textes de la pyramide de Pepi Ier (Saqqara), in: CRAIBL 1977, 277–279.

Beleg 3

Typ: Fayence-Figurine

Beschreibung: Lischt, Grab Nr. 315, Friedhof der Nord Pyramide, heute im Brooklyn Museum

Datierung: Mittleres Reich, späte 12. Dynastie

Publikation: J. Bourriau, in: St. Quirke (Hg.), Middle Kingdom Studies, 1991, 17.

Beleg 4

Typ: Sargtexte

Beschreibung: CT VI, 258f–g, festgehalten auf zwei Särgen aus Saqqara

Datierung: Mittleres Reich, 12. Dynastie, Zeit von Amenemhet II. oder später

Publikation: H. Willems, Chests of life: A study of the typology and conceptual development of Middle Kingdom standard class coffins, 1988, 106.

Beleg 5

Typ: Papyrus

Beschreibung: Pap. Prisse, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

Datierung: Mittleres Reich, 12. Dynastie⁶⁰

Publikation: G. Jéquier, Le papyrus Prisse et ses variantes, 1911.

Beleg 6

Typ: Papyrus

Beschreibung: Pap. Kahun VI.12

Datierung: Mittleres Reich, späte 12. Dynastie

Publikation: F Ll. Griffith, Hieratic Papyri from Gurob and Kahun II, 1898, pl. 3.

Beleg 7

Typ: Papyrus

Beschreibung: Pap. Weill = Pap. Cairo JE 52000⁶¹

Datierung: Zweite Zwischenzeit oder Neues Reich, 17. oder 18./19. Dynastie⁶²

Publikation: J.F. Borghouts, in: Textes et langages de l'Égypte pharaonique 3, BdE 64/3, 1974, 12.

Beleg 8

Typ: Totenbuch

Beschreibung: Spruch 125

Datierung: tritt in der erwähnten Form ab der 18. Dynastie auf⁶³

Publikation: E. Naville, Das aegyptische Todtenbuch der XVIII. bis XX. Dynastie II, 1886, 302.

⁶⁰ Die Datierung ist laut Parkinson, op.cit., 83 umstritten. Siehe hierzu auch: ders., in: Quirke (Hg.), Middle Kingdom Studies, 1991, 103, 106–107.

⁶¹ Das Fragment des sogenannten Pap. Weill ist eine Teil des fragmentarischen Pap. Cairo 52000.

⁶² Zu den Angaben zur Datierung siehe: Amenta, op.cit., 9.

⁶³ Parkinson, op.cit., 62.

Beleg 9

Typ: Schreibtafel

Beschreibung: Orientale Institute Chicago, Inv.-Nr. OIC 13539

Datierung: Neues Reich, 18./19. Dynastie

Publikation: G. Posener, in: RdE 11, 1957, 122, pl.7.

Beleg 10

Typ: Papyrus

Beschreibung: Pap. Leiden I, 348, Nr. 4, vs.1,2ff. = Pap. Anastasi IV, 10,5–10,8

Datierung: Neues Reich, 19. Dynastie

Publikation: J.F. Borghouts, in: OMRO 51, 1971.

Beleg 11

Typ: Papyrus

Beschreibung: Pap. Chester Beatty VII, vs. I, 5 ff., British Museum, London, Inv.-Nr. 10687

Datierung: Neues Reich, 19. Dynastie, Zeit Ramses II.

Publikation: A.H. Gardiner(Hg.), Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, 1935, Tf. 33–38A.

Beleg 12

Typ: Papyrus

Beschreibung: Pap. Cairo JE 86637 (recto III–XXX; verso I–IX, 11)

Datierung: 19. Dynastie, Zeit Ramses II.

Publikation: A. Bakir, The Cairo Calendar No. 86637, 1966.

Beleg 13

Typ: Schreibtafel

Beschreibung: Institut français d'Archéologie orientale, Kairo,

Inventarnummer: oDeM 1214

Datierung: Neues Reich, 20. Dynastie

Publikation: G. Posener, Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques littéraires de Deir el-Médineh II, 1951–1972, 29, pl.48.

Beleg 14

Typ: Papyrus

Beschreibung: Pap. Chester Beatty I, recto 11,1–13,5, British Museum, pBM 10681

Datierung: Neues Reich, 20. Dynastie, Zeit Ramses V.

Publikation: A.H. Gardiner, The Library of A. Chester Beatty, 1931.

Beleg 15

Typ: Papyrus

Beschreibung: Pap. Chassinat I = Pap. Louvre E.25351

Datierung: Spätzeit, 25. Dynastie⁶⁴

Publikation: G. Posener, in: RdE 11, 1957, 119–137.

Beleg 16

Typ: Stele

Beschreibung: Metternich-Stele, heute im Metropolitan Museum, New York

Datierung: 30. Dynastie, Zeit Nektanebos II.

Publikation: C.E. Sander-Hansen, Die Texte der Metternichstele, AnAe 7, 1956.

⁶⁴ Auch in diesem Fall ist die Datierung nicht sicher. Siehe hierzu: Parkinson, op.cit., 68, Anm. 83.

*Beleg 17**Typ:* Verbum *hm**Beschreibung:* *hm* – „homosexuellen Geschlechtsverkehr ausüben“, WB III, 80, 6 – „eine verbotene unzüchtige Handlung“*Datierung:* Ptolemäerzeit*Publikation:* S. Schreiber, in: Ägypten im Afro-orientalischen Kontext. Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere, Sondernummer, 1991, 333.*Beleg 18**Typ:* Tempelinschrift*Beschreibung:* Zwei Opferszenen im Tempel von Edfu*Datierung:* Ptolemäerzeit*Publikation:* Edfou I, 82.5–6 und Edfou II, 44.12–13*Beleg 19**Typ:* Papyrus*Beschreibung:* Pap. Berlin P 15549+15551+23727*Datierung:* 1. Jh. v.Chr.⁶⁵*Publikation:* H.S. Smith, The Demotic Papyri, in: Graeco-Roman Memories 61, 1975, 258.*Beleg 20**Typ:* Papyrus*Beschreibung:* Pap. Insinger 6, 21*Datierung:* 1. Jh. n.Chr.⁶⁶*Publikation:* M. Lichtheim, Observations on Pap. Insinger, OBO 28, 1979, 283–305.*Beleg 21**Typ:* Papyrus*Beschreibung:* Pap. Carlsberg XIII b 2,33*Datierung:* Spätzeit, vermutlich 2. Jahrhundert n.Chr.⁶⁷*Publikation:* A. Volten, Demotische Traumdeutung, AnAe 3, 1942.*Beleg 22**Typ:* Sargtexte*Beschreibung:* CT VI, 333h*Publikation:* R. Parkinson, in: JEA 81, 1995, 64.*4 Religiöse und mythische Ebene**4.1 Die Erzählung von Horus und Seth*

Homosexueller Kontakt zwischen den Göttern Horus und Seth ist in diversen Schriftstücken belegt, die vom Alten Reich (Pyramidentext 1036 aus der Vorkammer der Pyramide Pepi I. in Saqqara, *Beleg 2*) bis in die griechisch-römisch Zeit (Pap. Berlin P15549 + 15551 + 23727, *Beleg 19*) reichen. Es gibt „two versions of the legend of the struggles between Horus and Seth“⁶⁸, in denen es zu homosexuellen Handlungen kommt: Zum einen die „Geschichte von Horus und Seth“⁶⁹, zum

⁶⁵ Nach: K.-Th. Zauzich, in: Grammata Demotika – Festschrift für Erich Lüddeckens, 1984, 276.

⁶⁶ Siehe hierzu: K.-Th. Zauzich, in: LÄ IV, 898.

⁶⁷ Datierung nach A. Volten, Demotische Traumdeutung, AnAe 3, 1942, 3.

⁶⁸ L. Green, in: KMT 12/4, 2001, 57.

⁶⁹ Pap. Kahun VI.12. Siehe hierzu: Griffith, op.cit., pl. 3.

anderen der „Wettstreit zwischen Horus und Seth“⁷⁰, wobei gesagt werden muss, dass sich die beiden Versionen stark ähneln und nicht von allen Autoren eine Trennung zwischen ihnen vorgenommen wird.⁷¹ Die Vielzahl der Belege der Erzählung, in welcher der homosexuelle Kontakt der beiden Götter erwähnt wird, ist, verglichen mit der geringen Anzahl sonstiger Belege, enorm. Dies zeigt sich auch bereits daran, dass von den 22 Belegen, die in Punkt 3.1 angeführt worden sind, 8 Belege den homosexuellen Kontakt zwischen Horus und Seth zum Inhalt haben, sich also mehr als ein Drittel der bekannten Belege zum Thema Homosexualität nur mit dieser Geschichte befasst.

Im Folgenden sollen die Inhalte der einzelnen Belege wiedergegeben und miteinander in Verbindung gesetzt werden. Dabei wird nicht chronologisch vorgegangen, sondern mit dem Schriftstück begonnen, auf welchem die Erzählung um den „Wettstreit zwischen Horus und Seth“ am besten erhalten ist.

4.1.1 Pap. Chester Beatty I (Beleg 14).

Der Papyrus wurde im Arbeiterdorf von Deir el-Medina auf der Westbank in Theben gefunden und befindet sich heute im British Museum in London. Er wird in die Regierungszeit von Ramses V. datiert.

In der Episode, in welcher der homosexuelle Kontakt zwischen den beiden Göttern enthalten ist, treten Horus und Seth im Wettstreit um die Nachfolge des von Seth ermordeten Osiris auf der Erde mehrfach vor die Neunheit. Der Abschnitt lautet wie folgt:

The quarreling deities came for the court of the Heliopolitan Ennead:

Then the Ennead said: „Horus and Seth shall be summoned and judged!“ So they were brought before the Ennead. The All-Lord spoke before the Great Ennead to Horus and Seth: „Go and heed what I tell you: eat, drink, and leave us in peace! Stop quarrelling every day!“

Then Seth said to Horus: „Come, let us have a feast at my house.“ And Horus said to him: „I will. I will.“ Now when evening had come, a bed was prepared for them, and they lay down together. At night, Seth let his member become stiff and inserted it between the thighs of Horus. And Horus placed his hands between his thighs and caught the semen of Seth. Then Horus went to his mother Isis: „Come, Isis my mother, come and see what Seth did to me.“ He opened his hand and let her see the semen of Seth. She cried out aloud, took her knife, cut off his hand and threw it in the water. Then she made a new hand for him. And she took a dab of sweet ointment and put it on the member of Horus. She made it become stiff, placed it over a pot, and let his semen drop into it.

In the morning Isis went with the semen of Horus to the garden of Seth and said to the gardener of Seth: „What plants does Seth eat here with you?“ The gardener said to her: „The only plant Seth eats here with me is lettuce.“ Then Isis placed the semen of Horus on them. Seth came according to his daily custom and ate the lettuce which he usually ate. Thereupon he became pregnant with the semen of Horus.

Then Seth went and said to Horus: „Come, let us go, that I may contend you in the court.“ And Horus said to him: „I will, I will.“ So they went to the court together. They stood before the Great Ennead, and they were told: „Speak!“ Then Seth said: „Let the office of ruler be given

⁷⁰ U.a. aufgezeichnet auf dem Pap. Chester Beatty I, recto 11,1–13,5 und Pap. Leiden I, 348 Nr. 4, verso 1,2ff.

⁷¹ Eine Trennung der beiden Erzählungen nimmt beispielsweise Parkinson, op.cit., 70 vor, während Amenta, op.cit., 7–9 dies nicht tut.

to me, for as regards Horus who stands here, I have done a man's deed to him!" Then the Ennead cried out aloud, and they spat out before Horus. And Horus laughed at them; and Horus took an oath by the god, saying: „What Seth had said is false. Let the semen of Seth be called, and let us see from where it will answer.“

Thoth, lord of writing, true scribe of the Ennead, laid his hand on the arm of Horus and said: „Come out, semen of Seth!“ And it answered him from the water in the midst of the marsh. Then Thoth laid his hand on the arm of Seth and said: „Come out, come out, semen of Horus!“ And it said to him: „Where shall I come out?“ Thoth said to it: „Come out of his ear.“ It said to him: „Should I come out of his ear, I who am a divine seed?“ Then Thoth said to it: „Come out from the top of his head.“ Then it came out as a golden sun-disk on the head of Seth. Seth became very angry, and he stretched out his hand to seize the golden sun-disk. Thereupon Thoth took it away from him and placed it as a crown upon his (own) head. And the Ennead said: „Horus is right, Seth is wrong.“ Then Seth became very angry and cried out aloud because they had said: „Horus is right, Seth is wrong“⁷².

4.1.2 Pap. Kahun VI.12 (Beleg 6)

Eine gut erhaltene Variante der zweiten Version der Erzählung findet sich auf einem Papyrus aus der späten 12. Dynastie.⁷³ (Beleg 6). F.Ll. Griffiths bemerkt dazu Folgendes: „It is itself fragmentary, but contains lines which are both, coherent and clear“⁷⁴. Laut J. Assmann handelt es sich bei dem Text nicht um eine mythologische Erzählung, sondern eventuell um einen magischen Text⁷⁵. R. Parkinson weist darauf hin, dass es sich gemäß des Textstils um eine literarische Erzählung handelt, und dass Beziehungen zwischen magischen / religiösen und literarischen Texten sehr eng sein können⁷⁶. Der auf dem Papyrus erhaltene Text lautet folgendermaßen:

The Majesty of Seth said to the Majesty of Horus: „How beautiful are thy buttocks! How flourishing (?)...“⁷⁷ The majesty of Horus said: „Wait that I may tell it ... to their palace“⁷⁸. The majesty of Horus said to his mother Isis ... Seth desires (?) to have intercourse with me. And she said to him: „Take care, do not approach him for that; when he mentions it to thee a second time, say thou to him: „It is altogether too difficult for me because of (my) nature (?), since thou are too heavy for me, my strength will not be equal to thine“⁷⁹, thou shalt say to him. Then, when he shall have given thee strength, do thou place thy fingers between thy buttocks. Lo, it

⁷² M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature II*, 1976, 219–220. A. Erman, in: SPAW 1916, 1142f. verweist auf die Entstehung des Thot aus dem Scheitel des geschwängerten Seth. Dies wird von H. Kees, in: ZÄS 60, 1925, 1 aufgenommen. Dieser erklärt dadurch die sonst unverständliche Genealogie „Thot, der Sohn der beiden Herren, der aus dem Scheitel hervorging“. Er fügt weiter hinzu: „Eine solche Sagenfassung muss schon ziemlich alt sein, denn sie scheint in einem Sargtext aus Bersche vorausgesetzt, wenn der Tote als Thot zu Osiris sprechen kann: „Ich bin der Sohn deines Sohnes, der Same deines Samens, der Gott, der die beiden Brüder schied“.

⁷³ Griffith, op.cit., pl. III.

⁷⁴ J.G. Griffiths, *The Conflict of Horus and Seth from Egyptian and classical sources*, 1960, 42.

⁷⁵ Parkinson, op.cit., 70.

⁷⁶ Parkinson, op.cit., 70.

⁷⁷ Griffiths, op.cit. bemerkt zu dieser Stelle: „Griffith's transcription here is questionable. [...] Griffith translates tentatively *distende(?) pedes tuos(?)*“. Parkinson, op.cit., 70 übersetzt: „Broad (*wsh?*) are [your] thighs [...]“, Amenta, op.cit., 9 schlägt als Übersetzung „stretch out (?) your feet (?)“ vor.

⁷⁸ Amenta, op.cit., 9 übersetzt an dieser Stelle: „„Go away! I will tell [it to my mother Isis]. When they arrived] to their palace...“.

⁷⁹ Parkinson, op.cit., 71 übersetzt hier: „It is too painful (*qns*) for me entirely, as you are heavier (*dns*) than me. My strength (*phtj*) shall not match / support (*rmn*) your strength (*phtj*)“.

*will give... Lo, he will enjoy it exceedingly (?) ... this seed which has come forth from his generative organ, without letting the sun see it... Come thou*⁸⁰.

Es gibt noch weitere Textbelege, die direkt oder indirekt auf den homosexuellen Verkehr zwischen den beiden Götter eingehen. Sie sollen im Folgenden genannt werden.

4.1.3 Pap. Leiden 348 Nr. 4 (Beleg 10)

Auf dem Papyrus ist eine Sammlung von 39 magischen Sprüchen gegen Kopfschmerzen, Magenschmerzen, Albträume und einiges mehr festgehalten. Bei dem folgenden Ausschnitt handelt es sich um einen Teil eines Zauberspruches gegen Kopfschmerzen

*„(Mein) Sohn Horus verbrachte die Zeit, indem er schlief in einem Polster(lager) aus nd-Gewebe. Es erweckte ihn sein Bruder Seth dadurch, dass er sich an ihm verging*⁸¹*. Sein Ressort ist es, (sich zu bemühen um ?) die unteren Körperpartien. Ich habe den von den Göttern Gesuchten abgelenkt und Fäden / Streifen von einem Stück nd-Gewebe gebracht, versehen mit sieben Knoten. Ich will sie geben an den großen Zeh des NN, geboren von der NN, so dass er sich gesund erhebt*⁸².

Die Zusammensetzung ist im Wesentlichen dieselbe, wie im Pap. Kahun: Seth vergeht sich an Horus, dieser sucht Rat und Hilfe bei seiner Mutter Isis. Sie gibt ihm Ratschläge, wie er den Samen des Seth wirkungslos machen kann. Er solle den Samen mit den Händen auffangen und verhindern, dass die Sonnenstrahlen darauf fallen. „Es bestehen also feste Zusammenhänge zwischen den die beiden Götter repräsentierenden Körperteilen: dem Auge des Horus und den Hoden des Seth. Wie erst die Sonne (= Auge) den Samen zur Wirkung kommen lässt, so kann umgekehrt von den Hoden eine Schädigung des Kopfes bewirkt werden: Der Gift-Samen des Incubus Seth verteilt sich über die Gefäße im Körper und führt unter anderem auch zu Schmerzen im Kopf. [...], das heißt ein Verhindern des Eindringens des Gift-Samens über den After hat das Ausbleiben der Kopfschmerzen im Gefolge“⁸³.

4.1.4 Pyramidentext 1036 (P/A/E 30–31)(Beleg 2)

Der in den Pyramidentexten erhaltene Beleg des homosexuellen Kontaktes zwischen den beiden Göttern ist zeitlich der früheste. Die Textstelle, die Jean Leclant erstmals bearbeitet hat⁸⁴, befindet sich an der Ostwand der Vorkammer der Pyramide Pepi I. und lautet:

bnn Hr w hr jrt.f njt dt.f [...]

Dass Horus klagt, ist wegen seines Auges seines Leibes...

zhzh Stš hr hrwj.fj

Dass Seth schreit, ist wegen seines Hodens.

nʿj.n Hr w mtwt.f m ʿrt Stš

Dass Horus seinen Samen fließen lässt, ist in den After des Seth.

nʿj.n Stš mtwt.f m ʿrt Hr w

Dass Seth seinen Samen fließen lässt, ist in den After des Horus⁸⁵.

⁸⁰ Griffith, op.cit., pl.3, VI, 12, 28 ff.

⁸¹ W. Westendorf, in: GM 97, 1987, 71 weist darauf hin, dass Borghouts, The Magical Texts of Pap. Leiden I, 348, 16–17, 1971 diese Passage anders übersetzt: „The boy Horus spends the day lying on a cushion of nd-fabric and his brother Seth kept watch over him [because(?) he] lay stretched down(?) [...]“.

⁸² Westendorf, op.cit., 73.

⁸³ Westendorf, op.cit., 73–74.

⁸⁴ J. Leclant, Les Textes de la Pyramide de Pépi Ier (Saqqara), in CRAIBL 1977, 277–279.

⁸⁵ W. Barta, in: GM 129, 1992, 33.

A. Amenta weist darauf hin, dass der Stil des Textes eher auf einen magischen/liturgischen Charakter als auf eine mythologische Erzählung hindeutet⁸⁶.

4.1.5 Pap. Berlin P 15549 + 15551 + 23727 (Beleg 19)

Bei der Inschrift auf diesen Papyri handelt es sich um zwei demotische Fassungen der Erzählung, welche auf Pap. Chester Beatty I (Beleg 16) festgehalten ist. Beide Fassungen sind nur in Fragmenten erhalten und wurden annähernd gleichzeitig identifiziert. „Die Doppelnummer P 15549 + 15551 erklärt sich dadurch, dass die Anschlussmöglichkeiten des sehr kleinen Fragments P 15549 an den Hauptteil P 15551 bei der Inventarisierung nicht erkannt wurden“⁸⁷. Mittlerweile wurden die Fragmente zusammengefügt, P 15550 hat nichts mit dem Text zu tun. Das Fragment ist insgesamt 16 cm breit und 21 cm hoch, aus Kartonage gewonnen und hat zahlreiche kleine Beschädigungen und Löcher.

Bei P 23727 handelt es sich um ein 7 cm breites und 11,5 cm hohes Fragment vom oberen Rand des Textes. Ein direkter Anschluss der Zeilen 9 und 10 an die ersten Zeilen des Fragments P 15549 + 15551 ist möglich, so dass die ursprüngliche Höhe der Papyrusrolle auf 30,5 cm bestimmt werden kann⁸⁸. Der auf den Fragmenten erhaltene Text ist stark zerstückelt, doch kommt ihm „als Zeugnis einer langen literarischen Tradition hoher Wert zu“⁸⁹.

4.1.6 Pap. Weill = Pap. Cairo JE 52000 (Beleg 7)

Erneut handelt es sich um einen Papyrus mit magischen Texten. Bei dem zu nennenden Ausschnitt (recto 3,6) handelt es sich um eine magische Formel „with a specific reference to the sexual abuse committed by Seth against Horus“⁹⁰. Die Übersetzung lautet:

[...] *The seed of Seth is in the body of Horus, since Seth has emitted against him [...]*⁹¹.

4.1.7 Pap. Cairo JE 86637 (Beleg 12)

Dieser Papyrus ist auch unter dem Namen „Cairo Calendar“ bekannt und enthält nach Amenta möglicherweise einen Hinweis auf die sexuelle Gewalt, die Horus durch Seth zugefügt wurde:

[...] *The Majesty of Sais of Lower Egypt (= Horus?) goes to his mother Neith to show her the sufferance of his backside (art)*⁹².

C. Leitz hingegen weist daraufhin, dass es sich „kaum um ein Leiden am After und eine Anspielung auf den homosexuellen Verkehr des Seth mit Horus handeln“⁹³ kann und übersetzt die Passage mit:

[...] *Aufbruch der Majestät des <Sobek> zum nördlichen Sais seiner Mutter Neith, um sein Befeuchten der Schreibbinse im nördlichen Sais zu sehen*⁹⁴.

⁸⁶ Amenta, op.cit., 8.

⁸⁷ Zauzich, op.cit., 275–276.

⁸⁸ Zauzich, op.cit., 276.

⁸⁹ Zauzich, op.cit., 275. Zur Übersetzung des Textes siehe: Zauzich, op.cit., 277–278.

⁹⁰ Amenta, op.cit., 9.

⁹¹ Amenta, op.cit., 9.

⁹² Amenta, op.cit., 10. Siehe dazu außerdem: A. Bakir, The Cairo Calendar No. 86637, 1966, recto VIII, pl. VIIa, 1.9.

⁹³ C. Leitz, Tagewählerei I, ÄA 55, 1994, 64.

⁹⁴ Leitz, Tagewählerei, 63.

4.1.8 Metternich-Stele (Beleg 16)

Auf der Stele werden u.a. Vergiftungserscheinungen behandelt, die nach Bissen bzw. Stichen von Schlangen und Skorpionen entstehen. Diese haben als mythologischen Hintergrund „that the evil Seth sexually abused the child Horus“⁹⁵. In Zeile 153, Spruch 12 wird vorausgesagt, dass Horus sich nicht dem sexuellen Missbrauch durch Seth unterwerfen wird:

„Your buttocks belong to you, Horus, may Seth's strength never come in existence against you [...]“⁹⁶.

4.1.9 Unveröffentlichter Teil eines magischen Papyrus

Es gibt noch einen weiteren ungesicherten Beleg, den F.Ll. Griffiths in seiner Arbeit erwähnt⁹⁷. Da allerdings nicht mehr über ihn bekannt ist als die kurze Überschrift bereits sagt, ist er nicht mit einer Belegnummer versehen worden, soll hier aber dennoch aufgeführt werden.

Es handelt sich bei dem Beleg um Fragmente eines magischen Papyrus aus Saqqara, dessen Inhalt nach Griffiths Meinung „somewhat obscure“⁹⁸ ist. Der Text lautet:

„The seed of Seth is in the belly of Horus, since Seth has emitted against him. They became ... Turn back, turn back, thou, to annul that which thou hast done to (against) N son of N, even as the spittle did when it returned to ... his belly, since(?) the first time. This spell is to be said over...“⁹⁹.

Zusammenfassend kann zu dem homosexuellen Kontakt zwischen Horus und Seth gesagt werden, dass es dabei meistens weniger um den homosexuellen Verkehr an sich, als um die Einpflanzung des eigenen Samens in den Körper des Gegners geht, um diesen zu schwächen und/oder zu schädigen. Deutlich wird dies beispielsweise in den Zaubersprüchen gegen Kopfschmerzen (Beleg 10), in welchen darauf hingewiesen wird, dass Kopfschmerzen eben durch das Eintreten des Samens durch den After ausgelöst werden. Auch haben wir es in fast allen Fällen nicht mit homosexuellem Verkehr aufgrund von sexuellem Verlangen, sondern meist aufgrund von Machtausübung gegenüber einem Gegner zu tun. R. Parkinson weist aber in seiner Arbeit daraufhin, dass zumindest in der „Geschichte von Horus und Seth“ auf dem Pap. Kahun (Beleg 6) eher ein sexuelles Verlangen von Seth Auslöser ist, anders als im „Wettstreit zwischen Horus und Seth“, wo es sich um einen Trick handelt, um Macht über den anderen auszuüben¹⁰⁰. Ausgelöst wird Seths Verlangen durch die physische Attraktivität Horus', welche durch die Aussage „How beautiful are your buttocks?“ zum Ausdruck gebracht wird.

Beide Götter können sowohl die passive als auch die aktive Rolle während des Geschlechtsverkehrs einnehmen (Beleg 2), obwohl in den meisten Fällen die Rollenverteilung so gestaltet ist, dass Horus den passiven Part übernimmt, während Seth der aktive Partner ist. Der homosexuelle Verkehr zwischen den beiden Göttern ist auf das Engste mit dem Kampf zwischen ihnen verbunden, und W. Barta ist der Meinung, dass der homosexuelle Kontakt „in diesem Zusammenhang den Triumph des Siegers über den Besiegten“¹⁰¹ zum Ausdruck bringt.

⁹⁵ H. te Velde, Seth, God of Confusion, PÄ 6, 1967, 37–38.

⁹⁶ Amenta, op.cit., 10.

⁹⁷ Griffiths, op.cit., 44.

⁹⁸ Griffiths, op.cit., 44.

⁹⁹ Griffiths, op.cit., 45.

¹⁰⁰ Parkinson, op.cit., 70.

¹⁰¹ Barta, op.cit., 34.

Ein weiterer Aspekt, der in diesem Zusammenhang beachtet werden sollte, ist, dass es in der Erzählung keine Wertung gegenüber dem homosexuellen Verkehr an sich, wohl aber gegenüber der Rolle, die während des Verkehrs eingenommen wird, gibt. So wird Horus im Gerichtshof bespuckt, nachdem sich Seth zuvor gerühmt hat, an ihm „das Werk eines Mannes“ getan zu haben, was in diesem Zusammenhang nicht anders verstanden werden kann, als dass er den aktiven Part beim Geschlechtsverkehr übernommen hat, woraus geschlossen werden muss, dass Horus den passiven Part übernommen hat. Es spielt in diesem Zusammenhang offensichtlich keine Rolle, ob Horus diese Position freiwillig eingenommen hat, oder ob er von Seth in diese gezwungen wurde. Es kann also festgehalten werden, dass nicht der homosexuelle Akt an sich, wohl aber die Rolle, welche der Einzelne in ihm übernahm, bewertet wird. Näheres zu diesem Thema wird in Punkt 8.2 erarbeitet.

4.2 Varianten der Erzählung von Horus und Seth

4.2.1 Min und ein Feind

Der homosexuelle Kontakt zwischen Horus und Seth wurde in Schriftstücken über die Zeit erhalten, wie ja auch schon anhand der demotischen Papyri aus Berlin (*Beleg 19*) deutlich wurde. Ein weiterer Beleg für die lange zeitliche Verbreitung der Erzählung findet sich in zwei Opferszenen im Tempel von Edfu aus der Ptolemäerzeit (*Beleg 18*). Allerdings handelt es sich hier bei den Göttern nicht explizit um Horus und Seth, sondern es werden Min und ein Feind genannt. In zwei Opferszenen, die den König dabei zeigen, wie er dem Gott Min Lattich darbringt, finden sich Anlehnungen an die Erzählung vom Wettstreit zwischen Horus und Seth, die auf Pap. Chester Beatty I (*Beleg 14*) festgehalten ist. Die beiden Passagen lauten folgendermaßen:

*Offering of the lettuce. Repeat aloud: The beautiful vegetable, grown in the garden, may your heart rejoice by contemplating it. Let your [...] semen penetrate the body of the enemy [...], so that he becomes pregnant and your son [...] comes out from his head*¹⁰².

*Receive the beautiful green plant and what is in it (semen?), so that you [...] may expel the sacred seed that is in it, and the craven one [...] eats (it) and generates for you a son [...], who will come out of his forehead as a judge; thus you will be justified in front of the Court*¹⁰³.

A. Erman nimmt an, dass in diesen Texten Min offenbar als Horus gedacht ist und folgert daraus: „Ist Min aber hier gleich Horus, so wird der „Feind“ [...] kein anderer sein als Seth selbst“¹⁰⁴. Der entstandene Sohn wird als der „Richter“ bezeichnet, was nahe legt, dass es sich bei ihm um Thot handelt.

Es muss gesagt werden, dass diese Textstellen Wissen über die Erzählung in Pap. Chester Beatty zum Verständnis voraussetzt. A. Amenta fügt hinzu, dass „ritual scenes hide a complex mythological episode celebrating the triumph of Horus and of the light against Seth and the darkness; the seed of Horus, eaten by Seth with the leaves of the *bw*-plant¹⁰⁵, turns into the light of the Moon, which overcomes the darkness of the night“¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰² Übersetzung aus: Amenta, op.cit., 11. Siehe dazu auch: Edfou XI, pl. 247.

¹⁰³ Übersetzung aus: Amenta, op.cit., 11. Siehe dazu auch: Edfou II, 12–13, 44.

¹⁰⁴ Erman, in: SPAW 1916, 1142f.

¹⁰⁵ *bw* ist die Bezeichnung für Lattich. Siehe hierzu: L. Keimer, Die Pflanze des Gottes Min, in: ZÄS 59, 1924, 140–143.

¹⁰⁶ Amenta, op.cit., 11.

4.2.2 Hedjhotep und Month

Eine weitere Textstelle, erhalten auf Pap. Cairo JE 86637¹⁰⁷ (*Beleg 12*), erwähnt die Götter Hedjhotep und Month. G. Posener bemerkt dazu: „Ainsi, le II 3^{ht} 5 [...] il est défendu de s'unir à une femme, et toute personne née à cette date mourra par la copulation“, „ce jour où *hd-htp* a fait quelque chose contre Montou“. D'ailleurs *irt iht* «faire quelque chose» est déterminé ici par le phallus»¹⁰⁸. C. Leitz führt an, dass die ägyptischen Wortstellungsregeln gegen diese Übersetzung sprechen: „Sind bei einem von einer Präposition abhängigen Infinitiv eines transitiven Verbums sowohl Subjekt als auch Objekt nominal, so steht das Subjekt vor dem Objekt“¹⁰⁹. Er erwähnt weiter, dass grammatisch, da ein „Opfern des Phallus“ nicht sinnvoll erscheint, kaum eine andere Möglichkeit bleibt, als mit der Phallus-Hieroglyphe einen neuen Satz beginnen zu lassen und übersetzt den Text folgendermaßen:

„2. Monat der Überschwemmungszeit, Tag 5. Gefährlich! Gefährlich! Gefährlich! Du sollst nicht fortgehen aus deinem Haus auf irgendeinem Weg an diesem Tag. Du sollst nicht mit einer Frau schlafen. Jener Tag, an dem etwas hergestellt wurde. Der Phallus des Hedjhotep wird zu Month an diesem Tag. Jeder, der an diesem Tag geboren wird, stirbt wegen des Begattens“¹¹⁰.

C. Leitz verweist darauf, dass sich die bisherigen Versuche, in dem Text eine Vergewaltigung des Kriegsgottes Month durch den Gott der Webkunst Hedjhotep sehen zu wollen schon aus sprachlichen Gründen nicht haltbar sind. Vielmehr spiele die Passage auf die posthume Zeugung des Horus durch Osiris und Isis an. „Die vom Webergott hergestellte Nachbildung, der Phallus des Hedjhotep, wird zu Month, d.h. zum Stier, dem Symbol für die Zeugungskraft schlechthin. Für die Menschen ist an diesem Tag der Geschlechtsverkehr verboten, wer es dennoch tut oder an diesem Tag geboren wird, schlüpft in die Rolle des Osiris, dessen besonderes Merkmal es ist, als Toter seinen Nachfolger zu erzeugen, deswegen die Vorhersage *mwt.f n nk* „er stirbt wegen des Begattens“¹¹¹.

Obwohl es sich bei dieser Passage also offenbar nicht um eine homosexuelle Episode zwischen zwei Göttern handelt, sollte sie doch der Vollständigkeit halber hier aufgeführt werden, da in der Literatur immer noch Hinweise auf diese Zusammenkunft bestehen.

4.2.3 Seth und Anat

Auf dem Pap. Chester Beatty VII, verso 1,6, der Zaubersprüche gegen Skorpione und gegen Krankheiten enthält, ist die Vergewaltigung der Göttin Anat durch Seth festgehalten (*Beleg 11*). Es heißt dort: „...indem er sie bespringt wie ein Widder bespringt, indem er sie begattet wie ein ... begattet“¹¹². Seth hatte, nachdem sich das Göttergericht in der Frage um die Nachfolge Osiris' auf Erden für Horus entschieden hatte, als Entschädigung die fremdländischen Göttinnen Astarte und Anat als Gefährtinnen erhalten¹¹³. Während Anat in einem Fluss badet, überwältigt Seth sie von hinten und vergewaltigt sie, indem er sie wie ein Widder bespringt. „Gemeint ist an dieser Stelle

¹⁰⁷ Neben diesem Papyrus ist der Text noch auf Pap. Sallier IV (recto) erhalten. Eine weitere Parallele befindet sich auf einem Pap. des British Museum (No. 10474).

¹⁰⁸ G. Posener, *Sur l'emploi euphémique de hftj(w) «ennemi(s)»*, in: ZÄS 96, 1970, 33, Anm. 26.

¹⁰⁹ Leitz, op.cit., 68.

¹¹⁰ Leitz, op.cit., 68.

¹¹¹ Leitz, op.cit., 69–70.

¹¹² Schreiber, op.cit., 321. Die Textstelle wird auf S. 332 in der Arbeit nochmals übersetzt: „Er begattet sie, wie ein Widder begattet, er stößt sie, wie ein ... stößt“.

¹¹³ Schreiber, op.cit., 332.

wohl ein coitus a tergo, da es in pChester Beatty heißt *hr ph.s*¹¹⁴, also „Hinterer einer Person, sowohl allgemein Hinterteil als auch After“¹¹⁵. Bemerkenswert ist, dass Anat in dem Papyrus beschrieben wird, als „die Starke, die Frau, die männliche Dinge tut, gekleidet wie ein Mann, geschmückt wie eine Frau“¹¹⁶. H. te Velde schreibt zu dieser Textstelle Folgendes: „A passage already quoted describes a coitus in the style of Seth. [...] It is remarkable, that in this passage bisexual traits are ascribed to Anat: she is „clad as man and grit as woman“ and „acting as a male“. The story can hardly be called as paradigmatic for husband and wife.“¹¹⁷.

Anat ist also in diesem Text beschrieben als sowohl männlich wie auch weiblich, so dass es durchaus legitim ist, in diesem Text eine Parallele zu dem homosexuellen Kontakt zwischen Horus und Seth zu sehen. Eventuell ist es auch ein weiterer Beleg dafür, dass Seth Geschlechtsverkehr a tergo nicht nur zur Unterdrückung des an dem Akt teilnehmenden Partners benutzt, sondern tatsächlich eine Vorliebe für diese Art Geschlechtsverkehr mit Männern oder zumindest mit Frauen, die wie Männer aussehen, seitens Seth gezeigt werden soll¹¹⁸.

5 Homosexualität in der Jenseitsliteratur

Neben dem Spruch in Kapitel 125 des Totenbuchs, auf den hier nicht eingegangen werden soll, da er in Punkt 4.2 behandelt wird, gibt es noch zwei weitere Belegstellen, die sich in den Sargtext-Sprüchen 635 und 700 finden.

Im Sargtext-Spruch 635, welcher unter anderem auf zwei Särgen aus Saqqara festgehalten ist, von denen einer zu einer Frau gehört (*Beleg 4*), heißt es:

Re has no Power over N.

[It is N] who takes away his breath.

Atem has no power over N.

*N nks his backside (ʿrt) (CT VI, 258 f-g)*¹¹⁹.

W. Westendorf erwähnt diese Textstelle in seinem Artikel zur Homosexualität im Lexikon der Ägyptologie¹²⁰. Er sieht darin einen weiteren Beweis dafür, dass nicht der homosexuelle Akt an sich, sondern die Position in diesem bewertet wurde: „Die ‚Schande‘ liegt ganz auf Seiten des ‚Unterlegenen‘ [...], während der ‚Überlegene‘ damit den Triumph des Siegers über den Besiegten zu Ausdruck bringt“¹²¹.

Auch R. Parkinson sieht in dieser Passage den Beweis dafür, dass homosexueller Geschlechtsverkehr eine Demonstration von Macht über einen anderen darstellt und nicht deswegen ausgeübt wird, weil man sein Gegenüber körperlich anziehend findet und begehrt¹²². Des Weiteren weist er darauf hin, dass „despite the context of the deceased entering the afterlife, the act has nothing to do with initiation, as it has in many other cultures where sexual contact between a mature man and a youth can mark the latter’s transition from childhood to manhood“¹²³.

¹¹⁴ Schreiber, op.cit., 332.

¹¹⁵ Schreiber, op.cit., 332, Anm. 80.

¹¹⁶ Pap. Chester Beatty VII, verso I, 7-8.

¹¹⁷ Te Velde, op.cit., 56.

¹¹⁸ Griffiths, op.cit., 42, Anm. 5 schreibt dazu: „Seth’s homosexual tendencies are further shown by the abnormal way in which he takes pleasure of the goddess cAnat in P.Chester Beatty VII, Vs 1,5ff.“.

¹¹⁹ Griffiths, op.cit., 64.

¹²⁰ W. Westendorf, s.v. Homosexualität, in: LÄ II, 1272–1274.

¹²¹ Westendorf, op.cit., 1272.

¹²² Parkinson, op.cit., 64.

¹²³ Parkinson, op.cit., 64.

Die zweite Belegstelle in den Sargtexten, Spruch 700 (*Beleg 22*), erwähnt nur R. Parkinson in seiner Arbeit¹²⁴, ansonsten ist sie gänzlich unbeachtet geblieben. Jedoch weist auch dieser darauf hin, dass der Kontext, in welchem sich der Spruch befindet, unklar ist. Es handelt sich um eine Passage, in der von Geb gesprochen wird, der einen Toten ehrt. Es heißt dann:

„his phallus is between the buttocks of his son and his heir“ (CT VI, 333h)¹²⁵.

R. Parkinson nimmt an, dass es sich bei den Sohn um Geb handelt und der Phallus zu dem toten Mann gehört. Er weist dem Spruch eine ähnliche Funktion wie Spruch 635, also die Demonstration von Macht über einen anderen, zu¹²⁶.

Weitere Textstellen zum Thema Homosexualität liegen in der Jenseitsliteratur nicht vor, jedoch lassen die vorhandenen Belege eine Interpretation der Akzeptanz und der Stellung von Homosexualität in der altägyptischen Gesellschaft zu, die in Abschnitt 8 der Arbeit näher ausgearbeitet werden soll.

6 Königliche Ebene

6.1 Die „Erzählung von Neferkare und General Sisenet“

Die Erzählung¹²⁷, in der ein König namens Neferkare, gemeint ist hier wohl Pepi II., der fünfte König der 6. Dynastie, und ein General namens Sisenet eine intime Beziehung unterhalten, ist uns durch drei fragmentarische Belege bekannt, welche aus der Zeitspanne zwischen der 19. Dynastie und der 25. Dynastie stammen. Die Erzählung stammt jedoch aus der Zeit vor der 19. Dynastie. G. Posener datiert sie aufgrund von sprachlichen und stilistischen Komponenten in das Mittlere Reich¹²⁸. R. Parkinson fügt dem noch Folgendes hinzu: „Stylistically, it is closer to the *Tale of King Cheops' Court* than to the more elevated tales of the Middle Kingdom such as *Sinuhe* or the *Shipwrecked Sailor*. This may be explained as the result of a later date of composition, or of its belonging to a different level of the literary canon. Nevertheless, it will still have been an elite composition, and was clearly an established part of written culture, having a very long reading history.“¹²⁹. Bei den drei Quellen, auf welchen die Erzählung erhalten ist, handelt es sich um zwei Schreibtafeln und einen Papyrus.

Die erste Schreibtafel (*Beleg 9*) stammt aus der späten 18. Dynastie oder der frühen 19. Dynastie und befindet sich heute im *Oriental Institute in Chicago* (OIC 13539). Sie ist aus Akazienholz gefertigt, welches mit einer Stuckschicht überzogen ist¹³⁰.

Die zweite Schreibtafel (*Beleg 13*) wird in die 20. Dynastie datiert, wurde in *Deir el-Medina* gefunden (oDeM 1214) und befindet sich heute im *Institut français d'Archéologie orientale* in Kairo. Sie besteht aus Kalkstein. Die Zugehörigkeit des Tafeltextes zu der Erzählung von Neferkare und General Sisenet ist wahrscheinlich, aber nicht vollkommen gesichert¹³¹.

Die beiden Tafeln scheinen den Anfang der Erzählung zu beinhalten, allerdings sind auf jeder nur einige fragmentarische Zeilen erhalten. Dennoch erfahren wir aus diesen Zeilen (OIC 13539

¹²⁴ Parkinson, op.cit., 64, Anm. 61.

¹²⁵ Parkinson, op.cit., 64, Anm. 61.

¹²⁶ Parkinson, op.cit., 64, Anm. 61.

¹²⁷ Siehe hierzu auch: E. Richter-Ærøe, s.v. Sisenet und Phiops, in: LÄ V, 957.

¹²⁸ G. Posener, in: RdE 11, 1957, 132–133.

¹²⁹ Parkinson, op.cit., 72.

¹³⁰ Posener, in: RdE 11, 1957, 119.

¹³¹ Posener, in: RdE 11, 1957, 122. Siehe hierzu außerdem: G. Posener, *Catalogue des ostraca hiératiques littéraires de Deir el Médineh II*, 29, pl. 48.

11.3–4), dass einer der beiden Protagonisten, nämlich der General, nicht verheiratet ist¹³², was eher ungewöhnlich anmutet, da sich vom Fehlen einer Ehefrau auf das Fehlen eines Sohnes schließen lässt, was wiederum zur Folge hat, dass niemand existiert, „der seinen Namen leben lässt“¹³³.

Weitere Informationen zu der Erzählung erhalten wir aus der dritten Quelle. Dabei handelt es sich um den Pap. Chassinat I, welcher heute auch unter der Bezeichnung Pap. Louvre E 25351 bekannt ist (*Beleg 15*). Der Text ist auf drei Seiten aufgezeichnet, von denen die erste bis auf wenige Zeichen komplett verloren ist, „the second and third episodes are on consecutive pages. The third page concerns the nocturnal encounters between the king and his military commander“¹³⁴.

Der erhaltene Text auf dem Papyrus lautet:

[...] *Then [he (i.e., Tjeti the son of Hentu) saw] the Majesty of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt Neferkarēc going out at night all alone, with nobody with him. Then he moved away from him so as not to be seen by him. Tjeti son of Hentu stood still, being concerned and saying: „Obviously it is true what people say, that he goes out at night!“. Tjeti son of Hentu followed this god closely, without letting his heart restrain him, in order to see everything that he was going to do. He (the King) arrived at the house of the general Sasetet. Then he threw a brick and stamped with his foot, so that a [ladder (?)] was lowered to him. He climbed up, while Tjeti son of Hentu stood waiting till His Majesty would return. After His Majesty had done what he desired with him, he returned to his palace and Tjeti followed him. When His Majesty had returned to the palace (l.p.h.), Tjeti went home. Now His Majesty went to the house of the general Sasetet in the course of the fourth hour of the night, he spent the next four hours in the house of the general Sasetet, and he entered the Palace when four hours remained till dawn. And Tjeti son of Hentu followed His [Majesty] every night without letting his heart restrain him, and (each time) after [His] Majesty had entered [the house of the general Sasetet (?)] / the Palace (?), Tjeti ...]*¹³⁵.

R. Parkinson weist daraufhin, dass in diesem Fall ganz klar sexuelles Begehren von Seiten des Königs vorliegt, der vermutlich die aktive Rolle übernimmt, und dass nicht etwa eine Handlung gegen (r) den General beschrieben wird¹³⁶. Er verweist weiter darauf, dass der Satzteil „had done what he desired with him“ bereits von G. Posener als eine Parallele zu der Vereinigung von Gott und Königin in der Geburtslegende der 18. Dynastie erkannt wurde¹³⁷, und er überlegt, ob es sich dabei vielleicht um eine Parodie früherer Formulierungen aus diesem Zusammenhang handeln könnte, die nicht erhalten sind¹³⁸. Dieser Meinung schließt sich J. van Dijk an, macht aber auch klar, dass nicht eindeutig belegt werden kann, ob es sich um eine Parodie handelt, da das Ende des Textes nicht erhalten ist¹³⁹. Van Dijk vertritt weiter die Meinung, dass die „Erzählung von Neferkare und General Sasetet“ „versteckte“ Bezüge zu einem Mythos habe: „It is well known that Egyptian art and literature often make use of symbols whose meaning was self-evident to the

¹³² *nn wn s.t-hm.t m [pr=f(?)]* – „there was no woman in [his house]“: J. van Dijk, in: C. Berger-El Naggar (Hg.), *Festschrift Leclant*, BdE 106/4, 1995, 387.

¹³³ Van Dijk, op.cit., 387.

¹³⁴ Parkinson, op.cit., 72.

¹³⁵ Van Dijk, op.cit., 388.

¹³⁶ Parkinson, op.cit., 72.

¹³⁷ Posener, op.cit., 130–131, Anm. 9: „Pour l’intelligence de cette phrase, comparer, dans la théogamie de Deir el-Bahari [...] ‘la Majesté de ce dieu fit avec elle (la reine) tout ce qu’il avait désiré’“.

¹³⁸ Parkinson, op.cit., 72.

¹³⁹ Van Dijk, op.cit., 391.

educated Egyptian, but which us, members as we are of a different culture, look more like messages in a secret code“¹⁴⁰. Einen Hinweis darauf sieht er in der Zeitaufstellung der Unternehmung, die am Ende der Erzählung gegeben wird: Während der 4. Nachtstunde geht der König zum General, verbringt dort vier Stunden und kehrt dann vier Stunden vor der Morgendämmerung in seinen Palast zurück. Dieser Vorgang wird von Tjeti, Sohn des Hentu „jede Nacht“ (*tnw grḥ*) beobachtet¹⁴¹. Die vier von den beiden Männern gemeinsam verbrachten Stunden, als die Nachtstunden fünf bis acht, wurden von den Alten Ägyptern *wšḥw* „tiefe Dunkelheit“ genannt. In genau dieser Zeit durchläuft der Sonnengott eine der gefährlichsten Phasen bei seiner Reise durch die Unterwelt: Re trifft auf Osiris' Körper, welcher zu diesem Zeitpunkt leblos und scheinbar tot ist. Die beiden Götter vereinigen sich zu einem: „Rē^c has come to rest in Osiris and Osiris has come to rest in Rē“¹⁴². Osiris wird durch Re wiederbelebt und wird so die nächtliche Form des Sonnengottes, gleichzeitig wird Re als eine Folge dieser Vereinigung wiedergeboren und ersteht am folgenden Morgen als Horus, Sohn des Osiris (Re-Harachte), wieder auf¹⁴³. J. van Dijk macht deutlich, dass die Vereinigung von Re und Osiris nie explizit mit sexuellen Begriffen umschrieben worden ist, andererseits würden die Texte erwähnen, dass die beiden Götter bzw. ihre Bas „einander umarmen“ und Re, der eins mit Osiris wird trägt den Namen „Horus in den Armen seines Vaters Osiris“ und am Morgen heißt er „Re, der aus den Armen seines Vaters aufsteigt“¹⁴⁴. J. van Dijk verweist hier auf P. Derchains Meinung¹⁴⁵, dass hierin eine „union intime“ gesehen werden kann und sagt selbst: „[...] the resulting re-birth of the young sun god as Osiris's son Horus well nigh implies a union of a sexual nature, albeit not one of the „normal“ kind“¹⁴⁶. R. Parkinson, der diese Theorie *van Dijk*s in seine Arbeit aufgenommen hat, fügt jedoch hinzu: „The union of the gods is never described in sexual terms, and so can be considered metasexual; the primordial and androgynous nature of the god also prevents any 'homosexual' aspect“¹⁴⁷.

Nach der Theorie J. van Dijk's wird der eben erwähnte Mythos in der „Erzählung von Neferkare und General Sisenet“ persifliert: Sowohl das mythische Ereignis, als auch der Besuch des Königs beim General finden in den vier mittleren Nachtstunden statt, der König kehrt in der 9. Nachtstunde in seinen Palast zurück, wenn der dunkelste Teil der Nacht vorüber ist und die Vorbereitungen zum Sonnenaufgang beginnen. Bei diesem wird der König in seinem Palast aufgehen, wie der Sonnengott am Horizont. In der Erzählung wird die Vereinigung von Re und Osiris in die homosexuelle Begegnung zwischen Neferkare und Sisenet verwandelt¹⁴⁸.

Sollte die Theorie *van Dijk*s stimmen und es sich bei der Erzählung tatsächlich um eine Parodie eines mythologischen Themas handelt, erhält das Ganze einen schlechten Beigeschmack: Religion war kein Thema, welches Satire unterzogen werden durfte und Blasphemie wird im „Negativen Sündenbekenntnis“ in Kapitel 125 des Totenbuchs verurteilt¹⁴⁹. Jedoch dürfte die Doppeldeutigkeit der Geschichte nur der gebildeten Zuhörerschaft aufgefallen sein, hauptsächlich wurde die

¹⁴⁰ Van Dijk, op.cit., 388.

¹⁴¹ Van Dijk, op.cit., 388.

¹⁴² Van Dijk, op.cit., 389.

¹⁴³ Van Dijk, op.cit., 389.

¹⁴⁴ Van Dijk, op.cit., 390.

¹⁴⁵ P. Derchain, *La perruque et le cristal*, in: SAK 2, 1975, 35.

¹⁴⁶ Van Dijk, op.cit., 390.

¹⁴⁷ Parkinson, op.cit., 72, Anm. 111.

¹⁴⁸ Van Dijk, op.cit., 390.

¹⁴⁹ Van Dijk, op.cit., 392.

„Erzählung von Neferkare und General Sisenet“ dargebracht, um das Publikum zu amüsieren. War doch das Verhalten Neferkares anscheinend nicht Maat-gerecht, außerdem kam noch erschwerend hinzu, dass es sich bei ihm um einen König handelte. G. Posener verweist darauf, dass er als einer der schlechten Könige in der Literatur angesehen wurde¹⁵⁰ und fügt weiter hinzu, dass die Geschichte eventuell „une satire des moeurs qui montre le décomposition de l’Ancien Empire à la veille de sa chute“¹⁵¹ sein sollte, worauf R. Parkinson ergänzt, dass dies voraussetze, dass sexuelle Beziehungen zwischen Männern als dekadent angesehen wurden¹⁵². Besondere Erheiterung dürfte die Erzählung bei der Hörerschaft der 25. Dynastie, aus welcher ja zumindest eine der überlieferten Quellen stammt, ausgelöst haben: Shabaka, der erste König dieser aus Nubien stammenden Dynastie, trug den Beinamen Neferkare. Er tat dies wohl in Anlehnung an die lange Regierungszeit Pepi II., die von Manetho mit 94 Jahren beziffert wird¹⁵³. Von der Geschichte, die über seinen Namensvetter in Umlauf war, dürfte er nichts gewusst haben. Bestimmt dürfte er sie nicht so amüsant gefunden haben wie seine Untertanen.

7 Private Ebene

7.1 Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep

Im Grab des Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep in Saqqara befinden sich drei im Relief gearbeitete Darstellungen, die die Grabherren in mehr oder weniger intensiver Umarmung zeigen (*Beleg 1*). Diese Darstellungen werden unterschiedlich interpretiert: Als zwei Brüder¹⁵⁴ oder sogar Zwillinge¹⁵⁵, als Freunde oder Kollegen¹⁵⁶, aber eben auch als homosexuelles Paar¹⁵⁷, welches sich eine Grabanlage teilt.

Das Grab des Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep wurde 1964 entdeckt¹⁵⁸, 1977 wurde das Grab veröffentlicht¹⁵⁹. Es befindet sich in Saqqara in der Südostecke eines alten Steinbruchs, der sich im Südosten des Djoserbezirks und etwa im Mittelteil des heutigen Unasaufwegs befindet und vermutlich aus der Zeit des Djoser stammt¹⁶⁰. „Bei der Anlage des Grabes des Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep sind mindestens zwei, wahrscheinlich sogar drei Bauphasen anzusetzen, wobei nicht zu entscheiden ist, ob die ersten Bauphase mit Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep zu verbinden ist“¹⁶¹.

Die im Folgenden beschriebenen Reliefs befinden sich auf der Westwand der Felskammer und der West- und Ostwand der Opferhalle.

¹⁵⁰ Posener, op.cit., 136.

¹⁵¹ Posener, op.cit., 137.

¹⁵² Parkinson, op.cit., 74.

¹⁵³ Van Dijk, op.cit., 393.

¹⁵⁴ A.M. Moussa/H. Altenmüller, Das Grab des Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep, AV 21, 1977, 42.

¹⁵⁵ J. Baines, in: *Orientalia* 54, 1985, 463ff.

¹⁵⁶ K. Mysliwiec, *Eros at the Nile*, 1998, 35 verweist hierauf ohne jedoch die Quellen zu nennen.

¹⁵⁷ Siehe u.a. Westendorf, in: LÄ II, 1273: „Vielleicht ist das „Grab der beiden Freunde“ ein Beweis dafür, dass ein intimes Verhältnis zweier Freunde aufgrund gegenseitiger Zuneigung ohne Anstoßnahme der Umwelt sogar für die Ewigkeit bewahrt werden konnte.“, Mysliwiec, op.cit., 35, Behlmer, op.cit., 32: „Mehrere Darstellungen der beiden Grabherren im Umarmungsgestus, ein sonst für Paare von verstorbenen *Männern* nicht belegter Darstellungstyp, haben zu Vermutungen darüber geführt, ob hier ausnahmsweise eine intime Beziehung zwischen zwei Männern für die Ewigkeit festgehalten werden soll.“ und Parkinson, op.cit., 62: „[...] in the iconography [...] the relation between the two men replaces the usual relationship between the tomb-owner and his wife. This has been cited as showing a same-sex couple, although both men have wives“.

¹⁵⁸ Mysliwiec, op.cit., 35.

¹⁵⁹ Moussa/Altenmüller, Das Grab des Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep, AV 21, 1977.

¹⁶⁰ Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 13.

¹⁶¹ Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 14.

7.1.1 Die Westwand der Felskammer

Die Westwand der Felskammer besteht aus zwei großen Wandabschnitten, einem Südabschnitt (Breite: 3,20m, Höhe: 1,25m) und einem Nordabschnitt (Breite: 3,70m, Höhe: 1,25m). Der Südabschnitt ist durch die beiden Durchgänge zur Opferhalle weiter unterteilt. Das gesamte Bildfeld wird seitlich durch die Farbenleiter eingefasst. Die obere Bildbegrenzung ist uneinheitlich: Im Südabschnitt besteht sie aus der horizontalen Farbenleiter, über welche ursprünglich ein Fries, bestehend aus gleichschenkligen Dreiecken mit dazwischen gesetzten, senkrechten Strichen, gesetzt worden sein könnte. Im Nordabschnitt scheint keine entsprechende Bildbegrenzung im oberen Bereich vorgesehen worden zu sein, das Bildfeld stößt direkt an die Decke der Kammer an¹⁶².

Auf dem Südabschnitt der Westwand sind die beiden Eingänge zur Opferhalle durch ein schmales Wandstück voneinander getrennt, welches die Funktion eines Mittelpfeilers hat. Im Bildfeld dieses Wandstücks befindet sich die Darstellung der sich umarmenden Grabherren¹⁶³ inmitten ihrer versammelten Kinder. Die Ehefrauen der beiden treten in dieser Darstellung nicht in Erscheinung. Nianchnum und Chnumhotep stehen sich leicht hintereinander gestaffelt gegenüber, wobei der in vorderer Reihe stehende Nianchnum von links nach rechts, der in hinterer Reihe stehende Chnumhotep, der teilweise von erstgenanntem überdeckt wird, von rechts nach links blickt. Die beiden Grabherren sind gleich gekleidet. Beide tragen ihr natürliches Haar, sind mit einem Halskragen geschmückt und sind mit einem Galaschurz mit Schurzzipfel und Gürtelschloss bekleidet. Der linke Arm Nianchnums hängt herab, mit der rechten Hand ergreift er den rechten Unterarm Chnumhoteps. Chnumhoteps rechter Arm ist hinter dem Rücken Nianchnums herumgeführt, seine Hand liegt auf Nianchnums rechter Schulter¹⁶⁴. Links hinter Nianchnum sind dessen Haupttitel verzeichnet¹⁶⁵, die Haupttitel Chnumhoteps befinden sich rechts hinter diesem¹⁶⁶. Im Folgenden wird diese Darstellung als Szene I bezeichnet.

7.1.2 Die Westwand der Opferhalle

In der Westwand der Opferhalle befinden sich die beiden Scheintüren der Grabbesitzer, die als Trennwand vor den Serdab des Grabes gesetzt worden sind. „Der rechte äußere Türrahmen der Scheintür des Nianchnum und der linke äußere Türrahmen der Scheintür des Chnumhotep sind in einem Mittelfeld zusammengeführt, das das Bild der sich gegenseitig umarmenden Grabherren zeigt“¹⁶⁷. Im Folgenden wird diese Darstellung als Szene II bezeichnet.

Auf der Darstellungen tragen die beiden Grabherren ihr natürliches Haar und sind mit dem Galaschurz mit Gürtelschloss und Schurzzipfel bekleidet. Nianchnum steht links und ergreift mit der nach vorn geführten linken Hand den linken Unterarm Chnumhoteps, welcher ihm gegenüber steht. Chnumhotep hat den rechten Arm hinter den Rücken Nianchnums gelegt, seine rechte Hand ruht auf dessen rechter Schulter. Diese Umarmungsszene ist bei weitem nicht so intensiv wie in den anderen beiden Darstellungen. Die Köpfe der beiden Grabherren nähern sich einander nicht,

¹⁶² Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 147–148.

¹⁶³ Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 149.

¹⁶⁴ Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 149.

¹⁶⁵ Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 149: *shd jrjw nwt pr-ʿ3 jrj jht njswt Nj-ʿnh-hnmw msw.f* „Der Aufseher der Nagelpfleger des Palastes und Verwalter des Königsvermögens (o.ä.), Nianchnum, sowie seine Kinder.“

¹⁶⁶ Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 149: *shd jrjw nwt pr-ʿ3 jrj jht njswt Hnmw-htpw msw.f* „Der Aufseher der Nagelpfleger des Palastes und Verwalter des Königsvermögens (o.ä.), Chnumhotep, sowie seine Kinder.“

¹⁶⁷ Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 171.

sondern sind, trotz der Umarmung, deutlich voneinander getrennt¹⁶⁸. Links bzw. rechts über den Köpfen sind die Titel und Namen des jeweiligen Grabinhabers zu lesen¹⁶⁹.

7.1.3 Die Ostwand der Opferhalle

Bei der Ostwand der Opferhalle handelt es sich im eigentlichen Sinne nicht mehr um eine Wand, da sich in ihr die beiden Eingänge befinden, durch welche die Feldkammer im Osten mit der Opferhalle im Westen verbunden ist. Die Wand besteht eigentlich nur aus dem zwischen den Durchgängen liegenden Mittelpfeiler sowie einem die ganze Wandbreite einnehmenden Türsturz¹⁷⁰. Im Bildfeld des Mittelpfeilers befindet sich die Darstellung der sich umarmenden Grabherren, welche im Folgenden Szene III genannt werden soll. Die Darstellung ist der beschriebenen Szene II auf der gegenüberliegenden Westwand ähnlich, so dass Moussa/Altenmüller darauf hinweisen, dass eine Korrespondenz zwischen den beiden Darstellungen besteht¹⁷¹, außerdem sind „alle drei Bilder [...] (welche die beiden Grabherren in einer Umarmung zeigen) in eine gleiche Raumachse gelegt“¹⁷².

Wie in Szene I und Szene II tragen die beiden Grabherren auch in dieser Darstellung den Gala-schurz, allerdings ist ihr Kopfschmuck hier die Strähnenperücke. In vorderer Reihe rechts steht Nianchchnum, in hinterer Reihe links Chnumhotep. Nianchchnum greift den rechten Unterarm seines Gegenübers, Chnumhotep hat die linke Hand auf die linke Schulter Nianchchnums gelegt. Die beiden stehen sich so eng gegenüber, dass sich ihre Nasen berühren. Die Namensbeischriften sind in senkrechten Zeilen jeweils hinter den Grabherren angebracht¹⁷³.

Szenen dieser Art sind bei zwei Männern ansonsten nicht belegt und selbst bei Umarmungsszenen zwischen dem Grabherren und seiner Ehefrau oder zwischen Mutter und Tochter bzw. Mutter und Sohn sind sie nur selten zu beobachten. „In keinem Fall wird die Umarmung in dieser intimen Weise, die vor allem durch die Berührung der beiden Nasen zum Ausdruck kommt, jemals dargestellt.“¹⁷⁴.

Aus diesen drei eben beschriebenen Szenen und der gerade erwähnten Tatsache, dass derartige Intimität zwischen zwei Männern nur in diesem Grab belegt ist, wird von einigen Autoren der Rückschluss gezogen, dass es sich bei Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep um ein homosexuelles Paar gehandelt hat, welches sich in einer Grabanlage bestatten ließ. Sollte dies tatsächlich der Fall sein, weist es daraufhin, dass Homosexualität, zumindest im Alten Reich, soweit toleriert war, dass kein Anstoß an der gemeinsamen Beisetzung genommen wurde. Gegen eine homosexuelle Beziehung der beiden Grabinhaber spricht, dass beide verheiratet waren und ihre Frauen zusammen mit ihnen

¹⁶⁸ Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 172.

¹⁶⁹ Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 172. Links über Nianchchnum: *jrj ʿnwt njswt jrjw pr-ʿ3 mḥnk njswt nb.f Nj-ʿnh-ḥnmw* „Der Nagelpfleger des Königs, der Aufseher der Nagelpfleger des Palastes, der Vertraute des Königs, einer, den sein Herr liebt, Nianchchnum.“ Rechts über Chnumhotep: *jrj ʿnwt njswt šd jrjw ʿnwt pr-ʿ3 mḥnk njswt mrrw nb.f Ḥnmw-ḥtpw* „Der Nagelpfleger des Königs, der Aufseher der Nagelpfleger des Palastes, der Vertraute des Königs, einer, den sein Herr liebt, Chnumhotep“.

¹⁷⁰ Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 163.

¹⁷¹ Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 163.

¹⁷² Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 172.

¹⁷³ Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 163. Links hinter Chnumhotep: *šd jrjw ʿnwt pr-ʿ3 jm3ḥw ḥr ntr ʿ3 Ḥnmw-ḥtpw* „Der Aufseher der Nagelpfleger des Palastes, geehrt beim Großen Gott, Chnumhotep“. Rechts hinter Nianchchnum: *šd jrjw ʿnwt pr-ʿ3 jm3ḥw ḥr ntr ʿ3 Nj-ʿnh-ḥnmw* „Der Aufseher der Nagelpfleger des Palastes, geehrt beim Großen Gott, Nianchchnum“.

¹⁷⁴ Moussa/Altenmüller, op.cit., 149.

in dem Grab dargestellt sind. Dass heterosexuelle Heirat kein Hindernis für eine zusätzlich geführte homosexuelle Beziehung ist, steht außer Frage, allerdings würde dies dann eventuell bedeuten, dass Homosexualität im Alten Reich so wenig toleriert war, dass Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep jeweils eine „Scheinehe“ eingegangen wären, um zumindest den äußeren Schein zu wahren. Aber wie würde dies die gemeinsame Grabanlage erklären? Außerdem sollte man sich weiter fragen, ob das Konstrukt der „Scheinehe“ zur Verschleierung von Homosexualität vielleicht ein zu modernes ist. Eine weitere Möglichkeit wäre, dass homosexuelle und heterosexuelle Beziehungen parallel nebeneinander existieren konnten, wobei dann die heterosexuelle Beziehung eventuell nur dazu gedient hätte, die Nachkommenschaft zu sichern.

Seltsam ist, dass ausgerechnet Szene II, welche sich zwischen den beiden Scheintüren befindet, die größte Distanz zwischen den beiden Grabherren aufweist. Sollte nicht gerade die Darstellung an dem „magischen Erscheinungsort für Verstorbene“¹⁷⁵ besonders innig sein? Oder ist sie mit Absicht distanziert gehalten? Solange es keine eindeutigen schriftlichen oder darstellerischen Belege gibt, die klar beweisen können, dass es sich bei Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep um ein bzw. um kein homosexuelles Paar gehandelt hat, wird weiterhin jeder Autor die Darstellungen wie gewünscht interpretieren können, denn eine Klärung der Frage, in welcher Beziehung die beiden Grabherren zueinander standen ist noch offen.

7.2 Sonstige

R. Parkinson führt in seiner Arbeit noch einen weiteren Beleg für Homosexualität auf der privaten Ebene an¹⁷⁶. Dabei handelt es sich um eine Fayence-Figurine¹⁷⁷ aus der späten 12. Dynastie, welche in Grab Nr. 315 auf der Ostseite des Nord Pyramiden Friedhofs gefunden wurde und sich heute im Brooklyn Museum befindet (*Beleg 3*). Es handelt sich dabei um einen „apparently ithyphallic squatting mal wearing an elaborately patterned kilt“¹⁷⁸, welche nach R. Parkinson von E. Riefstahl als „bedizened catamite“ interpretiert wurde¹⁷⁹. Die Figur wurde für den vermutlich männlichen Grabbesitzer in dem Grab als eine „male concubine figure“¹⁸⁰ platziert. Riefstahl schreibt nach R. Parkinson zu dieser Figurine weiter: „A forbidden pleasure which the Egyptian of Tomb 315 [...] had enjoyed in this world or hoped to enjoy in a better world to come“¹⁸¹. J. Bourriau hingegen sieht nach R. Parkinson in der Figur eine gewöhnliche männliche Figur, die einen Opfertisch hält¹⁸². Der von Riefstahl angedachte enorme Phallus ist seiner Meinung nach der abgebrochene Fuß des Opfertisches. Weitere Belege für Homosexualität im privaten Bereich liegen nicht vor.

8 Umgang mit Homosexualität

8.1 Umgang im Alltag

„Wie Homosexualität [...] in der Alltagswelt beurteilt wurde, ist nicht deutlich zu fassen“¹⁸³. Es ist nur möglich, aus den vorhandenen Quellen Rückschlüsse zu ziehen, die dann aber nicht als absolut,

¹⁷⁵ D. Arnold, *Lexikon der ägyptischen Baukunst*, 2000, 226.

¹⁷⁶ Parkinson, *op.cit.*, 63.

¹⁷⁷ Siehe hierzu: H.D. Schneider, *Shabtis I*, *Collections of the Nat. Museum of Antiquities Leiden* 2, 1977, 182.

¹⁷⁸ Parkinson, *op.cit.*, 63.

¹⁷⁹ E. Riefstahl, in: *Miscellanea Wilbouriana* 1, 1972, 137–143.

¹⁸⁰ Parkinson, *op.cit.*, 63.

¹⁸¹ Riefstahl, *op.cit.*, 137–143.

¹⁸² Bourriau, in: Quirke (Hg.), *Middle Kingdom Studies*, 17, n. 85.

¹⁸³ R. Müller-Wollermann, *Vergehen und Strafen*, PÄ 21, 2004, 126.

sondern allenfalls als Vermutung angesehen werden dürfen. Aus den Quellen geht hervor, dass nicht der homosexuelle Akt an sich, sondern die Rolle, die in diesem eingenommen wurde, bewertet wurde. Deutlich wird dies beispielsweise in der Erzählung des „Wettstreits zwischen Horus und Seth“. In dieser wird Horus vom Göttergericht bespuckt, nachdem Seth sich gerühmt hat, an ihm das „Werk eines Mannes“ begangen zu haben:

*Then Seth said: „Let the office of ruler be given to me, for as regards Horus who stands here, I have done a man's deed to him!“ Then the Ennead cried out aloud, and they spat out before Horus*¹⁸⁴.

In dieser Situation wird also ganz klar die passive Rolle, die Horus in dem homosexuellen Verkehr mit Seth einnahm, negativ bewertet. Die Tatsache, dass die passive „weibliche und damit als unwürdig betrachtete Rolle“¹⁸⁵ negativ bewertet wird, stellt eine Parallele zwischen dem Alten Ägypten, dem Alten Griechenland und dem Alten Rom dar (siehe hierzu Punkt 2.2).

Einen weiteren Hinweis darauf, dass Homosexualität in der ägyptischen Gesellschaft keine allzu große Toleranz erfuhr, findet sich in der „Erzählung von Neferkare und General Sisenet“. Die Treffen der beiden Männer finden in der Nacht in aller Heimlichkeit statt und sind immerhin so schockierend, dass die Verfolgung des Königs durch einen anderen Mann (Tjeti, Sohn des Hentu) aufgrund von Gerüchten gerechtfertigt scheint:

*Tjeti son of Hentu stood still, being concerned and saying: „Obviously it is true what people say, that he goes out at night!“ Tjeti son of Hentu followed this god closely, without letting his heart restrain him, in order to see everything that he was going to do*¹⁸⁶.

R. Parkinson erkennt in diesem Verhalten Anzeichen dafür, dass das Bekanntwerden der Beziehung zwischen Neferkare und General Sisenet einen Skandal zur Folge gehabt hätte, woraus zu schließen ist, dass Homosexualität, zumindest wenn eine königliche Person in den Geschlechtsverkehr verwickelt war, negativ bewertet wurde. Er fügt weiter hinzu, dass diese Auslegung nicht mit H. Goedicke's Annahme zu vereinbaren sei, dass „homosexual relations were not considered morally wrong as long as they were based on mutual consent“¹⁸⁷.

Es gibt noch einen weiteren Beleg für den Wunsch nach Geheimhaltung eines homosexuellen Geschlechtsverkehrs. In der „Geschichte von Horus und Seth“ deutet die Antwort Horus' nachdem Seth seine Absichten deutlich gemacht hat, darauf hin, dass das Verlangen Seths etwas ist, von dem Horus annimmt, dass Seth es geheim halten möchte¹⁸⁸:

*The Majesty of Seth said to the Majesty of Horus: „How beautiful are thy buttocks! How flourishing (?)...The majesty of Horus said: „Wait that I may tell it ...“*¹⁸⁹.

Einen Hinweis darauf, dass Homosexualität unter annähernd gleichaltrigen Erwachsenen zumindest eine gewisse moralische Verurteilung erfuhr, sieht R. Müller-Wollermann in der „Verächtlichmachung des Gierigen durch eine passive homosexuelle Rolle im P. Insinger“¹⁹⁰ (Beleg 20). Der Text in diesem lautet: „Wer aus Gier isst, mit dem kopulieren seine Kameraden“¹⁹¹. Die negative

¹⁸⁴ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature II*, 1976, 219–220.

¹⁸⁵ Müller-Wollermann, op.cit., 125.

¹⁸⁶ Van Dijk, op.cit., 388.

¹⁸⁷ H. Goedicke, in: *JARCE* 6, 1967, 102.

¹⁸⁸ Siehe hierzu auch: Parkinson, op.cit., 71.

¹⁸⁹ Griffith, op.cit., 28f.

¹⁹⁰ Müller-Wollermann, op.cit., 126.

¹⁹¹ Pap. Insinger 6, 21.

Bewertung der passiven Rolle in einem homosexuellen Akt wird allerdings erst durch den folgenden Satz deutlich: „Wer ohne Scham gierig ist, den trifft jegliche Verachtung“¹⁹². Das „Kopuliert werden“ durch die Kameraden ist also mit Verachtung gleichgesetzt.

Den Grund für die negative Bewertung der passiven Rolle sieht W. Westendorf vor allem in der Angst vor dem Eindringen des fremden Samens bzw. Giftes, beides heißt im Altägyptischen *mtwt*, in den eigenen Körper. „Die Furcht vor dem Samen-Gift spricht auch schon aus dem „altmemphitischen Nefertemhymnus“, in dem sich Schu und Tefnut gegen den geschlechtlichen Missbrauch durch ihren Vater Atum wehren: „Sein Same soll nicht in sie dringen“¹⁹³. Dies würde auch das häufige Auftreten der mit Homosexualität in Verbindung zu bringenden Mythen in den magischen Papyri, welche Sprüche gegen Vergiftungen enthalten, zumindest im Ansatz erklären. R. Müller-Wollermann sieht als Grund für die Missbilligung von Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten, dass eine gleichgeschlechtliche Beziehung keine Nachkommen hervorbringt und somit „unproduktiv“ für die Gesellschaft ist¹⁹⁴.

An dieser Stelle der Arbeit soll auch erwähnt werden, dass es eventuell ein eigenes Wort für „homosexuellen Geschlechtsverkehr ausüben“ gab (*Beleg 17*). S. Schreiber hat in den geographischen Listen der Gaue von Ägypten im Tempel von Edfu aus der Ptolemäerzeit in der Schilderung des sebennytischen Gaus einen Satz gefunden, den sie wie folgt übersetzt: „Sein Abscheu ist für ihn homosexueller Geschlechtsverkehr“.¹⁹⁵ Sie selbst merkt zu ihrer Übersetzung an: „Für die Übersetzung von *sm3 hm* gibt es zwei Möglichkeiten, da *sm3* in der Spätzeit auch „vereinigen“ im sexuellen Sinne bedeuten kann¹⁹⁶. Entweder stehen hier zwei Verben parallel, die zwei unterschiedliche sexuelle Handlungen ausdrücken, oder *hm* ist ein Partizip und bezeichnet damit das Objekt der Handlung *sm3 hm*. Da beide Wörter nur mit dem Phallus determiniert sind, lässt sich hier keine Entscheidung treffen.“¹⁹⁷

Sie führt auch an, dass ihre Übersetzung „homosexuellen Geschlechtsverkehr ausüben“ sich anhand der untersuchten Belege nicht eindeutig erschließen lässt. Klar ist nur, dass es in griechisch-römischer Zeit eine sexuelle Handlung *hm* gab, die an einigen Orten verboten war¹⁹⁸.

Zusammenfassend kann zu diesem Punkt also gesagt werden, dass nicht eindeutig zu klären ist, wie Homosexualität im Alltag aufgenommen wurde. Die Quellen legen jedoch den Schluss nahe, dass ausschließlich homosexuelle Beziehungen nicht gerne gesehen waren. Sie waren zwar anscheinend nicht offiziell verboten, wenn man von dem belegten kultischen Verbot aus dem sebennytischen Gau in der Spätzeit einmal absieht, dennoch ist anzunehmen, dass (passive) homosexuelle Handlungen missbilligt wurden und dass diejenigen, an denen diese begangen wurden, dem Spott und der Verachtung ihrer Mitmenschen ausgesetzt waren. Ein Grund dafür mag die von Müller-

¹⁹² Pap. Insinger 6, 22. Siehe hierzu ebenso wie zu Pap. Insinger 6, 21: M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature III*, 1980, 190.

¹⁹³ Westendorf, in: *LÄ II*, 1272. Siehe hierzu auch: H. Kees, in: *ZÄS* 57, 1922.

¹⁹⁴ Müller-Wollermann, *op.cit.*, 126. Sie verweist darauf, dass diese Einstellung im Alten China ähnlich war, und dass dort Bisexualität über ausschließliche Homosexualität vorherrschte.

¹⁹⁵ Schreiber, *op.cit.*, 333. In Anm. 92 fügt sie hinzu, dass Montet, *Géographie I*, 106 zu dieser Textstelle bemerkt: „La pédérastie (*sm3 hmw*) est absolument interdite. Nous ne connaissons pas la raison de cette interdiction.“

¹⁹⁶ *Wb III*, 451, 8: „begatten“.

¹⁹⁷ Schreiber, *op.cit.*, 334.

¹⁹⁸ Schreiber, *op. cit.* 334.

Wollermann angesprochene „Unproduktivität“ einer gleichgeschlechtlichen Beziehung sein¹⁹⁹, ein weiterer ist mit Sicherheit die Tatsache, dass einer der beiden Partner die „weibliche“, unwürdige und erniedrigende Stellung einnehmen musste. Zumindest bei dem Thema Sexualität hatte die Meinung und das Bild der Frau im Alten Ägypten keinen sonderlich hohen Stellenwert²⁰⁰.

8.2 Sanktionierung

Eine strafrechtliche Verfolgung oder Bestrafung von Homosexualität ist im Alten Ägypten nicht nachgewiesen²⁰¹. Es gibt weder Gesetze, die homosexuellen Verkehr zwischen annähernd gleichaltrigen Personen verbieten, noch sind irgendwelche Verurteilungen bekannt. Es sind allerdings zwei nicht-juristische Quellen belegt, die anscheinend ein Verbot von Homosexualität beinhalten. Zum einen ein Spruch im 125. Kapitel des Totenbuchs (*Beleg 8*), zum anderen die 32. Maxime in der „Lehre des Ptahhotep“.

R. Müller-Wollermann weist daraufhin, dass der Geschlechtsverkehr eines älteren Mannes mit einem Jungen oder deutlich jüngeren Mann anscheinend sehr wohl verurteilt worden ist²⁰². Als Beleg dafür führt sie einen Spruch in Kapitel 125 des Totenbuchs an. In der 27. Erklärung des „Negativen Sündenbekenntnisses“ im Totenbuch, Kapitel 125 heißt es:

„*I did not nk a nkk(w)*“²⁰³.

Das Verb *nk* bedeutet „koitieren, beischlafen, beschlafen, kopulieren, Geschlechtsverkehr haben, intim werden“²⁰⁴, *nkk* wird mit „Buhlnabe“²⁰⁵, aber auch mit „Strichjunge“²⁰⁶ übersetzt. Schreiber übersetzt den Abschnitt 27 des Totenbuchs wie folgt:

„*Oh (du), dessen Gesicht auf seiner Rückseite ist, der herausgeht in der Nähe des Grabes: N. hat nicht onaniert und er hat nicht mit einem Strichjungen (nkk) verkehrt*“²⁰⁷.

Sie fügt weiter an, dass es für das Verbum *nwh* mit sexueller Bedeutung zwei Belege aus dem religiösen Bereich gibt, aus denen sich schließen lässt, dass *nwh* soviel wie „onanieren“ bedeutet. Im religiösen Kontext wird es mit der Schöpfung in Zusammenhang gebracht und ist somit eine positiv bewertete Handlung. Im „Negativen Sündenbekenntnis“ des Totenbuchs muss der Verstorbene hingegen betonen, dass er nicht *nwh* gemacht hat. Direkt daran schließt sich die Beteuerung an, dass der Verstorbene keinen Geschlechtsverkehr mit einem *nkk* hatte. Der Kontext macht deutlich, dass beide Handlungen zumindest im Neuen Reich als Sünde angesehen wurden²⁰⁸. Schließt man sich dieser Übersetzung an, ist die Aussage R. Müller-Wollermanns, dass homosexueller Verkehr zumindest mit Jungen oder deutlich jüngeren Männern verboten war oder wenigstens als Sünde galt, richtig.

Zumindest R. Parkinson teilt die Meinung, dass die Passage in dieser Art zu übersetzen sei, nicht. Er übersetzt *nk* mit „to have penetrative sex (with)“ und *nkk(w)* mit „a man on whom a sex-

¹⁹⁹ Müller-Wollermann, op.cit., 126.

²⁰⁰ Siehe hierzu auch: Schreiber, op.cit., 318–319.

²⁰¹ Müller-Wollermann, op.cit., 126.

²⁰² Müller-Wollermann, op.cit., 127.

²⁰³ Parkinson, op.cit., 61.

²⁰⁴ R. Hannig, Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch – Deutsch, ³2001, 437.

²⁰⁵ Hannig, Großes Handwörterbuch, 438. Außerdem Wb II, 347, 8.

²⁰⁶ Schreiber, op.cit., 320, Anm. 28.

²⁰⁷ Schreiber, op.cit., 320. Sie verweist an dieser Stelle auch auf Hornung, Totenbuch, 238, der die Passage mit „Oh Hintersichschauender, der aus der verschlossenen Grube herausgeht: ich habe nicht gleichgeschlechtlich verkehrt (?)“ übersetzt.

²⁰⁸ Schreiber, op.cit., 320–321.

ual act is performed“²⁰⁹. Der Satz heißt seiner Meinung nach also soviel wie: „Ich hatte keinen penetrierenden Sex mit einem (passiven) Mann“. Schließt man sich dieser Möglichkeit der Übersetzung an, stimmt die Aussage Müller-Wollermanns nicht, sondern es liegt eine Unterscheidung der Rollen im homosexuellen Geschlechtsverkehr und ein Verbot der erwähnten Aktion an sich vor: „The words seem to distinguish ‚active‘ and ‚passive‘ roles, terms which I use here. *nkkw* refers to an individual as the participant in an action: the prohibition is against an activity, sodomy/buggery, not a category of person, a ‚homosexual‘ inherently characterized by an action“²¹⁰.

Der zweite Beleg, die 32. Maxime in der „Lehre des Ptahhotep“, hat den Übersetzern seit jeher Schwierigkeiten bereitet und die Diskussionen über diesen Abschnitt der Lehre reißen nicht ab. In jüngster Zeit wurde die Textpassage von F. Kammerzell/I.M. Toro Rueda²¹¹ bearbeitet. Die Bearbeitung wurde von F. Junge²¹² aufgenommen und von H. Goedicke²¹³ kommentiert. Die „Lehre des Ptahhotep“ findet sich neben der Aufzeichnung auf Pap. Prisse (*Beleg 5*), welche hier als Grundlage dienen soll, in Varianten auf Papyri des British Museum (Nr. 10371/ 10435 und 10509) und auf dem Tablette Carnarvon im Museum von Kairo²¹⁴.

Die für diese Arbeit relevante 32. Maxime befindet sich in der 14. Kolumne des Pap. Prisse und nimmt dort den Großteil der vierten bis sechsten Zeile ein. Die Passage der „Lehre des Ptahhotep“ lässt Schlussfolgerungen über die Sexualethik und die Moralvorstellungen, welche in der ägyptischen Oberschicht um ca. 2000 v. Chr. herrschten, zu. „In dem zitierten Abschnitt wird [...] direkt auf das Sexualverhalten des Adressaten Bezug genommen: Der erste Satz enthält die Aufforderung oder den Ratschlag, auf eine danach näher spezifizierte Form des Geschlechtsverkehrs zu verzichten ([...] *jm=k nk* ‚du sollst nicht begatten‘). Welche konkrete Praxis jedoch als unangebracht hingestellt wird, scheint nicht ohne weiteres klärbar zu sein – zumindest nach Maßgabe des Umstandes, dass die bisher vorliegenden Übersetzungen stark voneinander abweichen“²¹⁵. Das Spektrum des Umgangs mit der Textpassage ist breit: Es reicht von kommentarlosem Übergehen²¹⁶ über undeutliche und ungenaue Angabe des Inhaltes²¹⁷ bis zur Interpretation eines Verbots von männlich homosexuellem Verkehr²¹⁸. Des Weiteren wurde die Passage als Inzestverbot²¹⁹, als Tabuisierung des Koitus mit Schwangeren²²⁰ und als Pädophilieverbot²²¹ interpretiert. Für einen

²⁰⁹ Parkinson, op.cit., 61.

²¹⁰ Parkinson, op.cit., 62.

²¹¹ Kammerzell/Toro Rueda, in: *LingAeg* 11, 2003, 63–78.

²¹² F. Junge, Die Lehre des Ptahhoteps und die Tugend der ägyptischen Welt, *OBO* 193, 2003.

²¹³ H. Goedicke, Ptahhotep Maxim Thirty-two (P457–462), in: *GM* 201, 2004, 105–107.

²¹⁴ G. Jéquier, *Le papyrus Prisse et ses variantes*. Pap. de la Bibliothèque Nationale (nos 183 à 194), Pap. 10371 et 10435 du British Museum, Tablette Carnarvon au Musée du Caire publiés en fac-similé, 1911.

²¹⁵ Kammerzell/Toro Rueda, op.cit., 64.

²¹⁶ F.W. von Bissing, *Altägyptische Lebensweisheit*, 1955, 49: „[...] (?) [...]“.

²¹⁷ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature I*, 1973, 72: „This maxime is an injunction against illicit sexual intercourse. It is very obscure and has been omitted here.“

²¹⁸ Burkhard, Die Lehre des Ptahhotep, 195–221, in: G. Burkhard et al., *Weisheitstexte II*, *TUAT* 3, 1991: „[...]sehe ich [...] den ganzen Lehrspruch als eine Warnung vor Päderastie an.“

²¹⁹ F.-J. Chabas, *Le plus ancien livre du monde. Étude sur le Payrus Prisse*, in: *Œuvres divers I*, 1899, 212–213: «Ne fréquente pas (ne stupres) la femme de quelqu’un de ta race; tu connais ce qui s’oppose à l’eau de (ex) sa partie abtérieure, pas d’écoulement à qui est dans son ventre».

²²⁰ A. Erman, *Die Literatur der Ägypter*, 1923, 95: „Beschlafe nicht eine Frau mit(?) einem Kinde (eine schwangere?)“ und B. de Rachewiltz, *Black Eros. Sexual customs of Africa from prehistory to the present day*, 1968, 61: „There is a well-known taboo: ‚Do not have intercourse with a pregnant woman.“.

²²¹ E. Hornung, *Gesänge vom Nil*, 1990, 75: „XXXII (Schlafe nicht mit einer Minderjährigen)“ und Z. Žába, *Les maximes de Ptahhotep*, 1956, 96–97: „tu ne dois pas coucher avec une femme (qui est encore) enfant“.

Großteil der modernen Autoren handelt es sich bei der 32. Maxime in der „Lehre des Ptahhotep“ jedoch um ein Verbot homosexueller Praktiken²²², und die Passage wendet sich je nach Interpretation entweder gegen den passiven Partner²²³ oder ganz generell gegen Homosexualität²²⁴. Nach F. Kammerzell/I.M. Toro Rueda zieht dies „gravierende Konsequenzen für die Rekonstruktion der ägyptischen Mentalitäts- und Sozialgeschichte nach sich“²²⁵. In ihrer Arbeit verweisen sie auf die grammatischen Probleme innerhalb der Maxime, die aus dem nicht geklärten syntaktischen Verhältnis zwischen *hm.t* und *hrd* entstehen. „Wohl aus dem Unbehagen heraus, dass ein maskulines Personalpronomen nicht gut auf ein grammatisch feminines Element zurückweisen kann, bemühte man sich weiter um eine alternative Interpretation und meinte schließlich eine solche gefunden zu haben, dass man [...] (*hm.t hrd*) als Maskulinum auffasste und mit Ausdrücken wie „Buhlknebe“, „paederast-boy“, „woman-boy“, „adolescentefféminé“ wiedergab“²²⁶. D. Kurth fasst die Konstruktion als Badalapposition auf²²⁷, übersieht jedoch nach Meinung von F. Kammerzell/I.M. Toro Rueda, dass „gleich mehrere Bedingungen für eine derartige Konstruktion im vorliegenden Fall nicht gegeben sind“²²⁸. Sie führen weiter an, dass das mittellägyptische *hm.t hrd* definitiv nicht mit „woman-boy“ oder ähnlichen Konstruktionen übersetzt werden kann, da es sich dabei um eine Karmadhāraya-Komposition handelt, die im Ägyptischen nicht existiert: „In einer Sequenz von zwei Substantiven, die zum selben Satzteil gehören, ist entweder das erste der Nukleus und das zweite eine attributive oder appositionelle Erweiterung, oder aber wir haben es mit der Doppelbesetzung einer Konstituente zu tun, so dass die Koordination oder Disjunktion zweier Substantive vorliegt“²²⁹. Als neue Lösung des Problems wird von F. Kammerzell/I.M. Toro Rueda vorgeschlagen, in der Konstruktion *hm.t hrd* eine Disjunktion zu sehen und mit „eine Frau oder ein Junge“ zu übersetzen. Sie verweisen darauf, dass bei einer solchen Disjunktion, wenn sie aus zwei oder mehr Substantiven mit unterschiedlichem Genus besteht, ein rückverweisendes Personalpronomen normalerweise im Maskulinum Singular gebildet wird, wenn der Plural aus semantischen Gründen nicht genutzt werden kann²³⁰. F. Kammerzell/I.M. Toro Rueda kommen in ihrer Arbeit letztlich zu folgender Übersetzung:

„Unterlasse es, mit einer Frau oder einem Knaben zu schlafen, wenn du an seiner oder ihrer Miene Widerstreben gegen „das Wasser“ erkannt hast und es keine Linderung gibt für das, was in ihm oder ihr vorgeht. Es darf nicht dazu kommen, dass er oder sie die ganze Nacht lang Widerstand leistet und sich erst dann wieder beruhigt, wenn er oder sie sich das Herz zermürbt hat“²³¹.

Sie sehen es als gesichert an, dass es sich bei der 32. Maxime in der „Lehre des Ptahhotep“ weder um eine Tabuisierung des Geschlechtsverkehrs während einer Schwangerschaft noch um ein Verbot sexueller Beziehungen zu minderjährigen Mädchen handelt. Ebenso wenig handelt es sich um ein Verbot homosexueller Beziehungen. F. Kammerzell/I.M. Toro Rueda weisen sogar daraufhin,

²²² Kammerzell/Toro Rueda, op.cit., 69–70.

²²³ R. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and other Ancient Egyptian Poems*, 1997, 270, Anm. 41.

²²⁴ C. Lalouette, *Textes sacrés et textes profanes de l'ancienne Égypte*, 1984, 246.

²²⁵ Kammerzell/Toro Rueda, op.cit., 71.

²²⁶ Kammerzell/Toro Rueda, op.cit., 69.

²²⁷ D. Kurth, *Altägyptische Maximen für Manager*, 1999, 70.

²²⁸ Kammerzell/Toro Rueda, op.cit., 71; siehe hierzu zusätzlich op. cit., 71 Anm. 18.

²²⁹ Kammerzell/Toro Rueda, op.cit., 72.

²³⁰ Kammerzell/Toro Rueda, op.cit., 72 mit Verweis auf Gardiner, EG, § 511, 1.

²³¹ Kammerzell/Toro Rueda, op.cit., 74. Zur genauen Herleitung der gesamten Übersetzung siehe 73–74.

dass „der Verfasser der *Lehre des Ptahhotep* [...] keinerlei Unterschied in seiner Bewertung von heterosexuellen und homosexuellen Intimbeziehungen erkennen“²³² lässt. Sie sehen die Aussage der 32. Maxime darin, dass derjenige, der in einem sexuellen Verhältnis die dominierende Rolle einnimmt, Rücksicht auf die Bedürfnisse seines Gegenübers nehmen soll und gegebenenfalls eine Ablehnung seiner sexuellen Wünsche zu akzeptieren hat²³³.

H. Goedicke kritisiert die Interpretation von F. Kammerzell/I.M. Toro Rueda und schließt sich ihnen nicht an²³⁴. Er übersetzt die Maxime folgendermaßen:

*„You shall not copulate with a boy (as woman, i.e. anal contact)
After you learn objections to the seed from his front
Not shall there be an ejection of one who is in his body.
He shall not spend the night to make objections
But he shall be calm after he repulsed the wish“*²³⁵.

F. Junge hingegen übernimmt in seiner Arbeit die Theorie von F. Kammerzell/I.M. Toro Rueda, betitelt die 32. Maxime mit „Die Selbstbestimmtheit der Geschlechtspartner wahren“ und übersetzt sie wie folgt:

*„Du sollst nicht mit einer Frau oder einem Jungen beischlafen, wenn du Widerstand gegen die (Körper-) Säfte an ihren Mienen wahrgenommen hast und es keine Linderung gibt für das, was sie bewegt; sie sollten nicht die Nacht zubringen (müssen), Widerstand zu leisten, so dass sie erst dann zur Ruhe kämen, wenn sie ihren Sinn gedemütigt haben“*²³⁶.

Die Diskussion um die 32. Maxime der „Lehre des Ptahhotep“ ist also nach wie vor nicht abgeschlossen und es bleibt abzuwarten, wie sie sich in nächster Zeit entwickelt. Sollte die Übersetzung von F. Kammerzell/I.M. Toro Rueda allgemein akzeptiert werden, bleibt lediglich die 27. Erklärung des „Negativen Sündenbekenntnisses“ im Totenbuch, Kapitel 125 als Hinweis darauf bestehen, dass Homosexualität wie erwähnt zwar nicht juristisch, doch allem Anschein nach zumindest moralisch verboten war.

9 Weibliche Homosexualität

Über weibliche Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten gibt es noch weniger Belege, als über jene im Antiken Griechenland und Antiken Rom. Wie bereits in der Einleitung erwähnt, gibt es aus der Zeit vom Alten Reich bis zum Neuen Reich keinen eindeutigen Beleg²³⁷, auch wenn L. Manniche darauf hinweist, dass Zärtlichkeiten gleich welcher Art zwischen Frauen generell gerne dargestellt werden²³⁸. Erst in der Spätzeit gibt es einen Hinweis auf weibliche Homosexualität. Dieser stammt aus den Traumbüchern, welche auf dem Pap. Carlsberg XIII (*Beleg 21*) festgehalten sind. Der für diese Arbeit relevante Abschnitt befindet sich auf Pap. Carlsberg XIII b, 2, 33 und lautet:

²³² Kammerzell/Toro Rueda, op.cit., 75.

²³³ Kammerzell/Toro Rueda, op.cit., 75.

²³⁴ Goedicke, in: GM 201, 2004, 105–107.

²³⁵ Goedicke, in: GM 201, 2004, 107.

²³⁶ Junge, *Die Lehre des Ptahhoteps*, 181.

²³⁷ J. Toivari-Viitala, *Women at Deir el-Medina: a study of the status and the roles of the female inhabitants in the workmen's community during the ramesside period*, Egyptologische uitgaven 15, 2001, 160.

²³⁸ Manniche, op.cit., 24.

r šjḫm.t ḥj nk n.im-s i-s r sšnj n wbj r šrj mtw-s

„Wenn eine Ehefrau mit ihr coitum facit²³⁹, wird sie ein Schicksal des Elends (erleben), ein Kind von ihr wi(rd...)“²⁴⁰.

L. Manniche übersetzt diese Textstelle etwas moderner mit:

„If she dreams that a woman has intercourse with her, she will come to a bad end“²⁴¹.

Dies ist der einzige Beleg überhaupt, der explizit homosexuellen Verkehr zwischen zwei Frauen erwähnt²⁴². H. Goedicke führt außerdem an, dass es eine Totenbuch-Variante für eine Frau gibt²⁴³, in der es heißt: *n nk.j t3jt ḥmwt* („Ich habe keine Prostituierte beschlafen“). As it is contained in a text written for a lady, the passage would be meaningful only if it refers to lesbian practices.“²⁴⁴ L. Manniche führt diese Textstelle ebenfalls auf²⁴⁵, meldet aber ebenso wie W. Westendorf²⁴⁶ Zweifel dagegen an, dass es sich dabei tatsächlich um eine Aufzeichnung homosexuellen Verkehrs zwischen zwei Frauen handelt. Vielmehr äußert sie die Vermutung, dass der Text von einer Version kopiert worden ist, die für einen Mann bestimmt war, und dass der Schreiber lediglich den so entstandenen Fehler nicht korrigiert hat²⁴⁷.

R. Schumann/S. Rossini weisen auf eine Darstellung im Grab des Ramose aus der 18. Dynastie in Theben hin, auf welcher der Grabherr zusammen mit zwei Frauen nebeneinander auf einem Stuhl sitzend abgebildet ist. Die beiden Frauen umarmen einander in der Weise, in der sonst der König seine Gemahlin beim Senet-Spiel im Harem umarmt. Daraus schließen E. Schumann/S. Rossini, dass es sich hier um eine Liebesgeste zwischen zwei Frauen handelt. Sie erklären weiter: „La chatte s’attaquant à un oisillon est, à la fois, une séquence réaliste et un clin d’œil magique: Bastet-Tefnout sort ses griffes en crachant pour rappeler à l’ordre la symbole de la sexualité féminine. C’est sans doute intentionnellement que ce groupe est figuré sous le siège de la femme aux tendances homosexuelles qui semble oublier qu’elle doit jouer ici le rôle de Nephthys auprès d’Isis et d’Osiris!“²⁴⁸. Sollte die Vermutung von R. Schumann/S. Rossini stimmen, handelt es sich bei dieser Darstellung um die einzige Abbildung weiblicher Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten überhaupt.

Da es sich bei dem Wenigen hier Aufgeführten um alles handelt, was es über weibliche Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten zu sagen gibt, bleibt also auch an dieser Stelle nichts anderes als zu akzeptieren, dass ähnlich wie im Antiken Griechenland und Antiken Rom die Quellen zu weiblicher Homosexualität weitestgehend schweigen.

²³⁹ An dieser Stelle befindet sich der in der Einleitung erwähnte Wechsel innerhalb der Sprache, um das Verständnis zu erschweren.

²⁴⁰ Volten, op.cit., 86–87.

²⁴¹ Manniche, op.cit., 22.

²⁴² J. Tyldesley, *Judgement of the Pharaoh. Crime and Punishment in Ancient Egypt*, 2000, 163.

²⁴³ Aufgezeichnet auf dem Pap. Nestanebtasheru.

²⁴⁴ Goedicke, op.cit., 1967, 99, Anm. 22.

²⁴⁵ Manniche, op.cit., 22. Sie übersetzt folgendermaßen: „I have not had intercourse with any woman in the sacred places of my city god.“

²⁴⁶ Westendorf, in: LÄ II, 1273.

²⁴⁷ Manniche, op.cit., 22.

²⁴⁸ R. Schumann/S. Rossini, *Les secrets d’Hathor. Amour, érotisme et sexualité dans l’Égypte pharaonique*, 1999, 159.

10 Zusammenfassung

Anders als im Antiken Griechenland und im Antiken Rom, wo es zum Teil offizielle Belege, zumindest aber zeitgenössische Literatur (s.o.) zum Thema Homosexualität gibt, ist nach wie vor insgesamt wenig über gleichgeschlechtlichen Verkehr oder gleichgeschlechtliche Beziehungen im Alten Ägypten bekannt. Die vorhandenen Belege beziehen sich meist auf den religiösen/mythischen Bereich. Aus dem alltäglichen Leben ist so gut wie nichts überliefert. Weder ist für uns mit Sicherheit festzustellen, ob es eine ähnlich deutliche Trennung zwischen Homosexualität und Heterosexualität gab, wie sie für unseren Kulturkreis üblich ist, noch wird aus den Quellen deutlich, ob es eine Vorstellung einer homosexuellen Disposition gab, oder ob lediglich homosexuelle Handlungen beachtet wurden. Es hat jedoch den Anschein, dass weniger darauf geachtet wurde, welche Geschlechter miteinander Verkehr hatten, als welche Position der einzelne in diesem Verkehr einnahm: Die passive „weibliche“ Rolle wird negativer eingestuft als die aktive „männliche“ Rolle. Ein Beleg dafür findet sich in dem Bespucken des Horus im Gerichtshof, nachdem Seth deutlich gemacht hat, dass er mit Horus Geschlechtsverkehr hatte, wobei letzterer die passive Rolle einnahm. Daneben gibt es jedoch auch einen Beleg, der sich gegen die aktive Rolle in einem homosexuellen Geschlechtsverkehr ausspricht: Die 27. Erklärung des „Negativen Sündenbekenntnisses“ im Totenbuch, Kapitel 125. Dort heißt es „Ich habe nicht mit einem Strichjungen/Buhlnaben verkehrt“, was eindeutig so zu verstehen ist, dass der Verstorbene, der diesen Satz ausspricht, keinen Kontakt mit einem käuflichen Mann/Jungen hatte und nicht die, meiner Meinung nach zu dieser Zeit übliche, aktive Rolle in gekauftem homosexuellem Geschlechtsverkehr übernommen hat. Daraus ergibt sich meines Erachtens das Bild, dass, zumindest im Neuen Reich, Homosexualität gesellschaftlich nicht akzeptiert war und negativ bewertet wurde.

Ein anderes Bild ergibt sich eventuell für das Alte Reich, für welches wir nur zwei uns bekannte Belegstellen haben: Zum einen die Grabreliefs im Grab von Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep, zum anderen die Passage über Horus und Seth in den Pyramidentexten aus der Pyramide Pepi I. Nimmt man einmal an, dass es sich bei Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep tatsächlich um ein homosexuelles Paar gehandelt hat, welches sich zusammen bestatten ließ, entsteht daraus zwingend der Schluss, dass Homosexualität im Alten Reich soweit toleriert war, dass an dieser gemeinsamen Bestattung kein Anstoß genommen wurde.

In den Pyramidentexten liegt keine direkte Wertung der sexuellen Handlungen zwischen den beiden Göttern vor. Ich denke, dass der Akt dadurch, dass beide Götter sowohl die passive als auch die aktive Rolle einnehmen, sozusagen neutralisiert wird. Eventuell war aber die Grundidee, durch den homosexuellen Kontakt die Schädigung und vielleicht auch Schändung des Feindes auszudrücken, bereits vorhanden. Sollte dies der Fall sein, würde zumindest indirekt eine negative Bewertung von homosexuellem Verkehr vorliegen.

Es sind also zwei Schlussfolgerungen möglich: Die erste setzt voraus, dass Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep ein homosexuelles Paar war, welches sich gemeinsam bestatten ließ. Dies hätte zur Folge, dass angenommen werden muss, dass gleichgeschlechtliche Beziehungen im Alten Reich toleriert waren und in den Pyramidentexten der homosexuelle Verkehr zwischen Horus und Seth nicht unter dem Aspekt der Schädigung (Schändung) des Feinds verstanden werden darf.

Als zweite Schlussfolgerung wäre es möglich, in den Pyramidentexten eine negative Bewertung homosexuellen Verkehrs als aggressives und demütigendes Verhalten dem Feind gegenüber zu sehen. In Folge dessen wäre es schwer vorstellbar, dass Homosexualität soweit toleriert war, dass

ein homosexuelles Paar sich ein gemeinsames Grab errichten konnte, woraus sich die Frage ergeben würde, ob Nianchnum und Chnumhotep tatsächlich eine gleichgeschlechtliche Beziehung hatten, oder ob sie nicht in einer anderen Beziehung zueinander standen, die diese Bestattung erklären würde. Ich persönlich halte die zweite Schlussfolgerung für einleuchtender, da es in den späteren, jüngeren Texten, die den homosexuellen Kontakt zwischen Horus und Seth beschreiben, stets weniger um den homosexuellen Verkehr an sich, als um Schädigung und vielleicht auch Schändung des Feindes geht, weniger um Lust, siehe man einmal von dem Pap. Kahun ab, in welchem Seths Verlangen durch Horus' Attraktivität ausgelöst zu werden scheint, als um Machtdemonstration gegenüber dem Feind. In welcher Beziehung Nianchnum und Chnumhotep zueinander standen ist weiterhin unklar. Ich denke jedoch nicht, dass beide eine gleichgeschlechtliche Beziehung miteinander hatten, auch wenn man aufgrund der Reliefdarstellungen zu diesem Schluss kommen könnte. Meines Erachtens war Homosexualität auch im Alten Reich nicht soweit toleriert, dass eine gemeinsame Bestattung eines gleichgeschlechtlichen Paares denkbar gewesen wäre.

Ein weiterer Beleg dafür, dass Homosexualität nicht akzeptiert bzw. negativ bewertet wurde, findet sich in der „Erzählung von Neferkare und General Sisenet“. In der Geschichte muss sich der König nachts aus seinem Palast schleichen, um sich mit seinem Liebhaber/Geliebten treffen zu können. Dies allein ist Grund genug anzunehmen, dass Homosexualität etwas war, das im Verborgenen stattfinden musste, da es gesellschaftlich nicht akzeptiert wurde. Ein weiterer Hinweis auf die Tatsache, dass homosexueller Kontakt nur im Geheimen stattfand, findet sich in der „Geschichte von Horus und Seth“ auf dem Pap. Kahun. Wie erwähnt wurde, deutet die Antwort, die Horus Seth auf dessen Angebot gibt darauf hin, dass Seth seinen homosexuellen Verkehr mit Horus geheim halten möchte.

Es bleibt also festzuhalten, dass es so aussieht, als wäre Homosexualität sowohl im Alten Reich als auch im Neuen Reich gesellschaftlich nicht akzeptiert gewesen, was den Schluss zulässt, dass diese Haltung vermutlich ebenso für das Mittlere Reich anzunehmen ist. Auch wenn F. Kammerzell/I.M. Toro Rueda mit ihrer Interpretation der 32. Maxime der „Lehre des Ptahhotep“ Recht haben und sich diese nicht, wie bisher angenommen, gegen Homosexualität ausspricht, sondern zu mehr Verständnis für die Wünsche und Empfindungen des Sexualpartners auffordert, so deutet die Mehrzahl der Belege dennoch darauf hin, dass Homosexualität in der ägyptischen Gesellschaft negativ bewertet wurde und nicht akzeptiert war.

Was mit Sicherheit anhand der Quellen festzustellen ist, ist die Tatsache, dass Sexualität zwischen Frauen so gut wie keine Erwähnung findet. Dies gilt nicht nur für das Alte Ägypten, sondern ebenso für das Antike Griechenland und Antike Rom. Ein Grund dafür ist mit Sicherheit, dass die Geschichtsschreibung und andere literarische Arbeiten zu diesen Zeiten hauptsächlich von Männern ausgeübt wurden, was zur Folge hat, dass selten weibliche Homosexualität von einer Frau geschildert wurde, eine Ausnahme bilden hier für die griechische Zeit die Arbeiten der Sappho. Wenn das Thema überhaupt zur Sprache kam, schrieben Männer über weibliche Homosexualität. Dies hatte häufig fehlende Neutralität und daraus resultierende Bewertung zur Folge.



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Lettuce and the Sycomore: Sex and Romance in Ancient Egypt¹

JACK R. HARLAN²

In ancient Egypt, lettuce was considered an aphrodisiac and was featured in the yearly festival of Min, an ithyphallic god of fertility and procreation. The Greeks considered it an antiaphrodisiac and its use as a soporific continued into this century. The sycomore fig has a highly specialized fertilization biology, but does not produce seed in Egypt for want of the proper species of wasp. Ripening has been hastened since ancient times by gashing the syconia. To the ancient Egyptians it was a sacred trysting tree inhabited by the goddess of love and was the focus of a body of love poetry. Some selected verses are presented.

The Crop Evolution Laboratory at the University of Illinois has traced the origins and evolution of a number of crops, mostly cereals and legumes, back into the mists of prehistory. This inquiry is set almost entirely in the historical time range and deals as much with human perceptions as with biological evolution. It actually began with a field trip of my class on "Crops and Man" to the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. That year, a new exhibit had opened with a reconstructed Egyptian tomb (the original stones moved many years ago from Egypt to Chicago) and a hand-painted copy of murals from Nacht's tomb. Among the offerings shown in Nacht's tomb is a strange plant consisting of a short stalk with leaf scars and blue, pointed leaves, said by some scholars to be lettuce (Fig. 1). Blue lettuce? Leaves linear attenuate? Other paintings showed the plant to be as tall as a man including an ostrich plume headdress (Fig. 2). This is lettuce? My curiosity was aroused and the hunt was on. What follows is an abbreviated sketch of the results. The investigations into the sycomore came in part from observing the processing of tomatoes in south Florida where I used to go to pollinate a winter nursery. Is the connection obvious? Read on!

LETTUCE (SEX)

The first step was to find out what other people thought the plant was. The results of an incomplete survey are shown in Table 1. One may conclude that opinions of scholars on the subject are of little help. I have, however, considerable confidence in Schweinfurth as a botanist, and if he thought the plant was lettuce, one should pay attention. Schweinfurth did not set forth his argument in print, but Keimer (1924a) produced a very convincing one which was elaborated elegantly by Gauthier (1931). To understand the argument one must follow mural chronology in some detail and trace the stylization that takes place over time.

The plant is shown in 12th dynasty tombs at Beni Hasan (Newberry, 1893) as a garden plant (Fig. 3). Here we see a sketch of pot irrigation: one man carrying

¹ Distinguished Economic Botanist's address delivered 13 August 1985 at Twenty-sixth Meeting, Society for Economic Botany, meeting jointly with the Botanical Society of America at the University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

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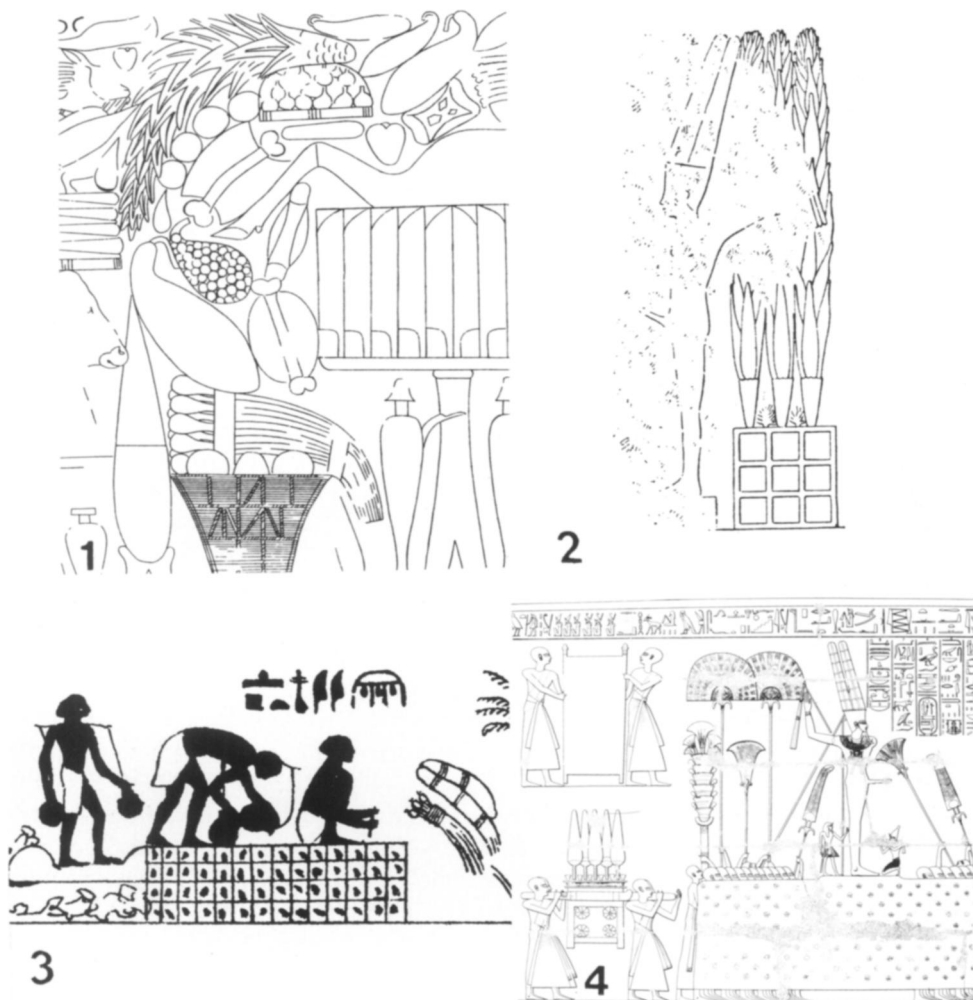


Fig. 1–4. Fig. 1. Offerings in rock tomb of Meir, Chapel B, No. 2 (Blackman, 1915, vol. 2, plate X). The plant at the top with pointed leaves and stem with leaf scars is lettuce. Fig. 2. The fertility god Min with erect lettuce behind him and erect phallus before. The stylized lettuce stands on stylized checkerboard representation of a garden. From Koptos (Keimer, 1924a, p. 142). Fig. 3. Garden scene showing pot irrigation and garden produce, lettuce and leeks, Beni Hasan, tomb 3 (Newberry, 1893, plate 29). Fig. 4. Part of festival of Min with men carrying erect lettuce plants on platform with stylized representation of checkerboard garden. They follow the statue of Min in the procession. University of Chicago, Medinet Habu, vol. 4, plate 201.

two filled pots on a pole across his shoulders, a second dumping his pots onto a checkerboard garden, another tending the garden either weeding or transplanting, and a bunch of the produce, shown above, right. The checkerboard represents planted areas surrounded by low ridges or bunds to hold the water and let it soak in. This system is in common use all over the Near East today, including Egypt. The checkerboard garden symbol follows the lettuce as both become more and more stylized. By the 18th dynasty both have become so stylized as to be hardly

TABLE 1. IDENTIFICATIONS OF "THE PLANT" SHOWN ON EGYPTIAN MURALS.

Trees in general: Lanzone (1885/6, reprinted 1974); Müller (1906); Reinach (1910); Tiele (1882); Wilkinson (1837); also Jéquier and Jollois and Devillier cited in Gauthier (1931).
Trees specific: Drexler (in Roscher 1884/86) cypress; Evans (1901) cypress; Gayet (in Gauthier, 1931) <i>Mimusops</i> ; Meyer (1909) cypress; Petrie (in Gauthier, 1931) palm spathe; Rochemonteix (in Gauthier, 1931) sycamore; Saint-Clair (in Gauthier, 1931) <i>Ficus</i> .
Others: Daressy (1900) lettuce; Foucart (in Gauthier, 1931) sorghum; Gauthier (1931) lettuce; Keimer (1924a) lettuce; Loret (1892) lettuce; Newberry (1893) flax; Rosellini (1832–44) radish, palm heart; Schweinfurth (in Keimer, 1924a) lettuce; Unger (in Gauthier, 1931) artichoke; Wilkinson (1854) lotus; Woenig (1886) beet, artichoke.

recognizable if the evolution of the symbols has not been followed (Gauthier, 1931; Darby et al., 1977).

Space and cost make it impossible to reproduce the whole story in figures but it is well developed by Keimer (1924a) and Gauthier (1931). In other murals, "the plant" is shown in checkerboard context being harvested with a digging stick or a sickle, effectively ruling out the tree theories.

Most important, however, is the association of lettuce with the god Min (later confounded with Amon). Min was a popular god in vogue from the Old Kingdom into Hellenistic times. He had a nome devoted to him, a number of temples consecrated to him, and was lord of the desert, the lightning, and the sandstorm. More importantly, he was a god of fertility and procreation. He is shown in a variety of configurations, but the main features of his representations are: an ostrich feather headdress, a scourge or flagellum, signifying power, a checkerboard stand or an offering stand with tall, erect lettuce plants behind him and an erect phallus before him (Bleeker, 1956). The god is depicted many times on temple or tomb walls, but if you have seen one Min, you have pretty well seen them all. The lettuce plants behind him, however, are shown in a great variety of treatments causing no end of confusion for scholars over the years.

There was a yearly harvest festival devoted to Min, usually in the first month of summer by the Egyptian calendar. The ceremony is depicted in detail on buildings constructed for Ramses II, Ramses III, Herihor, Seti I, Amenhotep III, Sosestris, and Thutmose III (Univ. Chicago, 1940). That of Ramses III is the most complete, but where sections have been defaced, extrapolations can be made from the other reliefs (Univ. Chicago, 1940, vol. IV, plates 193–249). The ceremony involves the following six episodes each showing the king in exaggerated size compared to his subjects.

1. The king sets out in procession carried in a sort of palanquin, preceded and followed by a retinue of priests, singers, dancers, and functionaries of various kinds.

2. He arrives at the temple that houses a statue of Min and performs a rite, presenting offerings and pouring out a libation on them. At this point Min is his usual ithyphallic self but does not have the lettuces behind him. Instead there is a symbol suggesting a round African house and bovid horns.

3. The procession leaves the temple carrying the statue of Min with additional dignitaries, musicians, and participants in public parade. A white bull precedes them, and retainers carry erect lettuces on a platform with checkerboard ornamentation behind the statue.

4. Four birds are released to fly to the four cardinal points of the earth, presumably to carry news of the celebration.



5. The king ceremonially cuts a sheaf of emmer wheat with a sickle symbolic of the harvest now beginning, and the bull is sacrificed.

6. Min is returned to his place in the temple; the king performs another rite of consecration, and this time Min has lettuces behind him.

Other participants include the queen, in the case of Ramses III without a name in her cartouche, and a black "priest." Min, himself, is sometimes shown black, suggesting along with the African house and horns that the ceremony may have originated in Black Africa, although lettuce is not a plant of tropical Africa.

Parading an image of a god in solemn procession was common in Egyptian religious celebrations. Sometimes the statues were made of stone and enormously heavy. This posed no great problem for the Egyptians; they mounted heavy stones on sledges and minimized friction with Nile mud. The procedure is shown a number of times on mural reliefs (Fig. 5). Often, only a few men were required to move a stone many tons in weight. The key to the operation is a little felahin with a jug of water making mud for the sledge to skid over (Fig. 5) (Montet, 1964).

The form of the lettuce shown on ancient Egyptian walls, is, of course, very different from what we can buy at the supermarket today. Plant breeders, both ancient and modern, have brought about great changes from the wild *Lactuca scariola* L. (or *L. serriola* Torner). The wild form is erect, the leaves are blueish with spiny leaves, the seeds shatter at maturity, and the plant is suffused with latex and very bitter (Helm, 1954). As Ryder and Whitaker (1976, p. 39) point out "The emphasis of early human selection must have been on non-shattering seedheads, absence of early flowering (bolting), non-spininess, decrease in latex content and increase in seed size, as well as on the hearting character." Lettuce was grown by the Egyptians for its oil, and lettuce seed oil was a fairly important commodity earlier in this century (Bonaparte, 1901; Milad, 1920). The oil varieties are still grown to some extent, but are bitter and not eaten as vegetables. Keimer (1924b) figures an Egyptian cultivar grown in the Botanical Garden at Berlin-Dahlem 1.5 m high and with appressed strap-like leaves. The Chinese selected lettuce for its stalk; the stem lettuce has reduced leaves but a stem up to 1 m in length (Herklots, 1972).

The Greeks associated Min with Pan because they were both ithyphallic gods, but they were certainly not equivalent. It would be unfair and inaccurate to interpret ithyphally as some sort of pornography. The symbolism is much too profound for that. We are dealing with the divine source of all life, a celebration of our very existence and all that is good and beautiful. As Gauthier (1931, p. 138) pointed out, the sign  (*nefer*), or  for emphasis, can mean "phallus" as well as beauty, pride, glory, strength, vigor, good, happy, excellent, etc. According to Diodorus Siculus (1933, IV, 6) there is a connection between Min and the origin of agriculture and the consequent rise of civilization. It was Isis who taught men how to cultivate wheat and barley and her husband/brother Osiris who forbade men from butchering and eating one another and taught them to live by civilized law. The Titans conspired against Osiris, killed him and dismembered the corpse. Isis tracked down the murderers, slew them and brought the pieces of the body together—all except the phallus that the Titans had thrown into the river. Isis presented the body of Osiris to the priests with the instructions that an

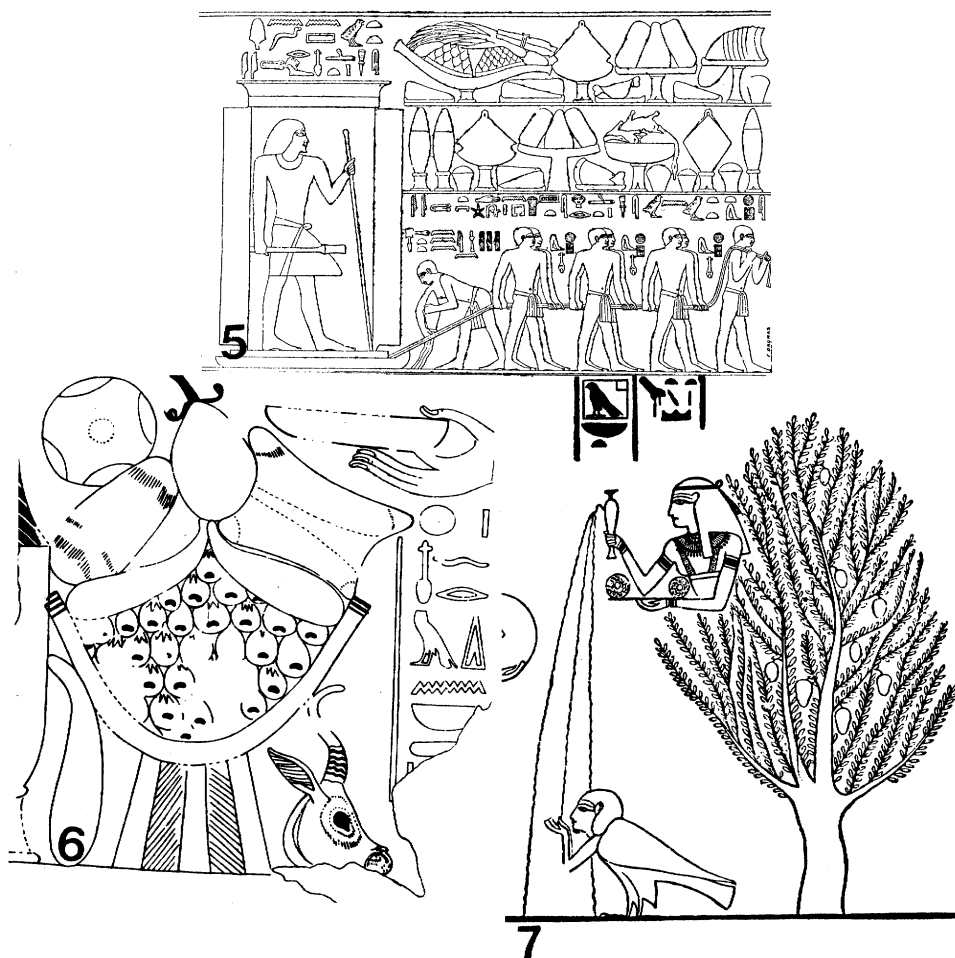


Fig. 5-7. Fig. 5. Moving heavy stone statue, tomb of Ti, corridor II, east (Montet, 1925, fig. 48, p. 388). The key to easy transport is the small figure in front pouring water to keep the mud pathway slippery. Note bunch of lettuce in upper register. Fig. 6. Offering stand with gashed sycomore "fruits" (Davies, 1913, plate 26). Fig. 7. Goddess of the sycomore pouring libation. She helps to arrange rendezvous with lovers (Wilkinson, 1883, vol. 3, plate 28, p. 118).

erect phallus be added and that he be worshiped as a god. Diodorus also stated (I, 88) that "... not only the Egyptians but not a few other peoples as well have in the rites they observe treated that male member as sacred on the ground that it is the cause of the generation of all creatures."

The association of lettuce with Min was not fortuitous; the Egyptians thought that lettuce was an aphrodisiac. Unlikely as it seems, it was firmly believed, and even today it is thought that one will have many children if one eats a lot of lettuce. Before you buy all the lettuce in Salinas Valley, let me give you the Greek version. They thought lettuce was an antiaphrodisiac. Athenaeus (1957) cites Amphis: "It was among the lettuce-plants, plague take them! Why, if a man not yet sixty should eat them when he desires commerce with a woman, he might twist and turn the whole night long without once accomplishing his desires, wring-

ing his hands against stern fate instead of acting like a man.” He cited others who claimed lettuce produces impotence (Athenaeus, 1957, II, 69). Augustus, the first Roman emperor, dedicated a statue to his physician, Antonius Musa, for curing him of being an hypochondriac, using lettuce as the treatment (Scotti, 1872; Pliny, n.h. XIX, 38; Leclerc, 1941).

The following quote from Pliny (n.h., XIX, 38) reveals a good deal about lettuce of the ancients:

The Greeks have distinguished three kinds of lettuce, one with so broad a stalk that it is said that the wicket-gates of kitchen gardens are often made of them; these plants have leaves rather larger than those of the green garden-lettuce, and extremely narrow, the nutriment being apparently used up elsewhere; the second kind has a round stalk, and the third is a squat-growing plant called the Spartan lettuce. . . . , while the worst kind of all has been given the name in Greek of bitter lettuce, in condemnation of its bitter taste. There is moreover another variety of white lettuce the Greek name for which is poppy-lettuce, from its abundance of juice with a soporific property, although all the lettuces are believed to bring sleep; this was the only kind of lettuce in Italy in early times, which accounts for the Latin name for lettuce, derived from the Latin for milk. A purple lettuce with a vary large root is called Caecilius's lettuce, while a round one with a very small root and broad leaves is called in Greek the antiaphrodisiac, or otherwise the eunuch's lettuce, because this kind is an extremely potent check to amorous propensities”

Here we find a rather good description of the tall, narrow leaved lettuce of the Egyptians, the bitter wild-type, and one especially potent as an antiaphrodisiac. Pliny specifies that the garden lettuce is green, implying that the tall kind is of another hue (blue?). According to Leclerc (1941), the “bitter herbs” of the Old Testament is translated in the Greek Septuagint as “wild lettuce.” But, how can the innocent, innocuous lettuce be a potent aphrodisiac to some and a potent antiaphrodisiac to others? The key is in the Latin name, *Lactuca*; the plant lactates by bleeding latex when broken or injured. The milky juice reminded the Egyptians of semen and, therefore, of fertility, procreation, and aphrodisiacal properties. The same juice reminded the Greeks of latex from the opium poppy that is soporific in nature and has the opposite effect. This also shows that people believe exactly what they want to believe.

Having worked my way through the stylized depictions of lettuce and its check-board gardens, the festivals of Min and the Greek antithesis, I rather thought the matter could rest in antiquity. Not so. There was a 19th century revival of interest in the medicinal properties of lettuce that is worthy of note.

It happens that this new interest in lettuce juice can be attributed to an American doctor in Philadelphia and a Scottish doctor in Edinburgh (Wood, 1868). The first, John Redman Coxe, published a paper in the Transactions of the American Philosophical Society (1799) with the remarkably pompous title: “Inquiry into the comparative effects of the *Opium Officinarum*, extracted from the *Papaver somniferum* or white poppy of Linnaeus; and of that procured from the *Lactuca sativa* or common cultivated lettuce of the same author.” In a masterpiece of self-deception, he convinced himself that lettuce juice had about the same properties as opium extract and was a lot cheaper and more available. The Scot, Dr. Andrew Duncan (1810) came to somewhat similar conclusions, described his method of extraction and coined the term “lactucarium” for the product.

Lactucarium soon became a standard item in the pharmacopoeia on both sides of the Atlantic. A small industry grew up, especially in France and Germany to

supply the commodity. Lettuce was allowed to bolt and the stalk repeatedly cut to collect the latex almost as if it were a *Hevea* rubber tree. Details are given in Kraemer (1907). Aubergier (1842) tested several species of *Lactuca* and found *L. altissima* to be remarkably productive of latex. The stems could reach 3 m in height and 4 cm in diameter. Pereira (1853), Husemann et al. (1884), and Kraemer (1907), among others, analyzed the product chemically without finding much except some weak organic acids and a little (very little) protein. Dr. Coxe published *The American Dispensatory* for many years, and as late as 1831 in the 9th edition resented the fact that Dr. Duncan had never given him credit for his “*anterior* remarks in the American Philosophical Society’s Transactions” (Coxe, 1831, p. 430).

The use of *Lactuca* latex died slowly. Wissowa and Kroll (1925) commented: “Heute ist dieser eingetrocknete Saft (lactucarium) nicht mehr gebräuchlich.” But Vignes (1932) as late as the 1930s reported considerable success in treating a variety of female disorders with lettuce extracts, but said that they should not be compared to opium, but rather to belladonna!

Although Coxe never referred to the ancients, it is hardly possible that he was not aware of them. The Greek herbal of Dioscorides was Englished by John Goodyear in 1655 and must have been well known to every Western medical man of the 18th century (Gunther, 1934). There it is stated about wild lettuce: “It is somewhat in virtue like unto the Poppy—[and it]—doth avert wanton dreams and veneries.”

Actually, the Greek version had never disappeared completely. Leclerc (1874) translated an Arabic medicinal treatise of the early 18th century in which the therapeutic properties of lettuce are described. Chomel (1782) claimed extracts of lettuce have soporific properties. Linnaeus, himself, was so convinced of the antiaphrodisiac qualities that he cited the case of a rich Englishman who very much wanted children. “He was told by his physician that the only way he could have children was to stop his use of lettuce which he very much abused” (Scotti, 1872).

SYCOMORE (ROMANCE)

The plant in question is the sycomore fig (*Ficus sycomorus* L.), not the American plane tree. The name derives from the Greek *Sykon* = fig and *Moro* = mulberry. The “fruit” of a fig is a syconium. Botanically, the true fruits are the drupelets that lodge between the teeth. It is said that in ancient Attica the export of figs was made illegal so that the local population could enjoy the entire crop. Such a law inevitably invited fig smugglers, and smuggling invites informers. A sycophant is one who tattles on fig smugglers.

Most figs are pollinated by wasps and the coevolution of wasp and fig is one of the most fascinating of biological phenomena. The common fig of commerce (*F. carica* L.) is usually pollinated by species of *Blastophaga*, although some cultivars are parthenocarpic and do not require pollination for fruit development. The process of caprification was well known from ancient times and was well described by Aristotle (Hist. Anim., V, 32:26). The females hatch in the wild-type caprifig, emerge from the syconium covered with pollen, fly to young syconia of the proper stage and force their way through the orifice. They lose their wings

and often parts of their antennae and foot segments in the process. They can deposit eggs in short-styled flowers only, but find upon entry into a syconium of a domesticated fig that man has played a cruel hoax on them. Man has selected cultivars with long-styled flowers only. The female wasp searches frantically for suitable places to deposit her eggs and pollinates the fig in the process. She soon dies without completing the life cycle which can only be done in the short-styled flowers of the caprifig (Eisen, 1901). The wasp has a natural preference for the caprifig so the process of caprification usually involves growing the wild-type separately and tying strings of caprifigs in the branches of the domesticated kind. The wasp then has no choice but to accept the cultivar with its long-styled flowers.

The pollination of the sycomore is more complex and remarkably elegant from an evolutionary point of view. The *Ceratosolen arabicus* males emerge from their galls inside the syconium before the females. They walk over to female galls and chew a hole through which they can insert the abdomen and fertilize the females while they are still in their galls. Each male fertilizes several females. Then, the males go to the distal end of the syconium where the male flowers are located and start cutting anthers. The females emerge and go to the cut anthers, open them, take out the pollen and stuff it into highly specialized pockets in the thorax. The males chew tunnels near the ostiole for the females to escape. The females leave, loaded with pollen, and the males die having performed their essential functions. The females find another syconium at the right stage, enter and deposit eggs in short-styled flowers while pollinating the long-styled ones (Wiebes, 1977). They actually take pollen out of the pollen pockets and apply it to the stigmas (Galil and Eisikowitch, 1969). The females die having completed their functions. Another species, *C. galili* has pollen pockets but does not fill them (Galil and Eisikowitch, 1969). What sort of selection advantage would induce the evolution of pollen pockets?

But in Egypt, elsewhere in North Africa, the Levant and Cyprus, the sycomore does not produce seed and all reproduction is man-assisted. In this region, the sycomore has wasps but they are the wrong species. *Sycophaga sycomori* L. behaves rather like the *Blastophaga* of the common fig but does not transport pollen. In fact, the wasps leave the syconium before the male flowers open (Galil, 1968). Shortly after eggs are laid in short-styled flowers and larvae begin to develop in the galls, another wasp, *Apocrypta longitarsus* Mayr lays its eggs in the same galls reaching them from outside the syconium with a very long, sensitive ovipositor. It is incapable of causing galls and never deposits an egg except in a gall already started by *S. sycomori*. The larvae of *Apocrypta* grow faster and cause the larvae of *S. sycomori* to die. It is a kind of parasitism something like that of cuckoos (Galil, 1967). From southern Sudan and Ethiopia southward, the pollinator wasps are present and seeds are produced.

The sycomore in Egypt does not produce seed but does produce a lot of wasp larvae. The ancients developed a technique to hasten ripening so that the fruit could be eaten before it was full of grubs. Theophrastus (h. p. IV, 1) wrote of the sycomore: "It cannot ripen unless it is scraped; but they scrape it with iron 'claws'; the fruits thus scraped ripen in four days." The prophet Amos was a professional fig scraper (Amos 7:14). The Hebrew word used is more accurately translated as "piercer" or "cutter" than scraper (Keimer, 1927). Henslow (1892), Keimer (1928) and Galil (1968) show figures of special knives used for the purpose in Egypt

where the practice of injuring the syconia to hasten ripening is still used. Careful examination of ancient Egyptian reliefs and paintings permits a distinction between common figs in the offerings and sycomore figs. The sycomores are always represented with a gash in each "fruit." Galil (1968) reported that after the syconium is cut it will grown grow very quickly increasing seven fold in size in 3–4 days.

The ancient practice of fig gashing is based on release of ethylene by injured fruit. Tomatoes are ripened artificially in Florida on a commercial scale by a similar procedure. In order to get uniform results, the fruits are picked gourd-green and if any should show signs of turning red, they are taken out on the sorting belts and treated separately. After washing and grading, the tomatoes are put in cartons and stacked in ripening chambers. Each chamber, in one of the plants I visited, held enough cartons to fill three huge semitrailer trucks. One liter of ethylene gas was sufficient for 12 h of ripening in each chamber. In Galil's experiments with sycomores, he found that one gashed fruit would ripen a plastic bag full of uninjured fruits (Galil, 1968).

As to the romance I promised, the sycomore was a sacred tree to the Egyptians and was inhabited by Hathor, the goddess of love (Keimer, 1929). To this day, an Egyptian woman with marital problems may linger under a sycomore in the hope that the spirit of the tree might render assistance (Brown and Walsingham, 1917). More specifically, the sycomore was a trysting tree; it was a place where lovers met. The tree has deep roots and can be found in the bottoms of dry washes at the edge of the desert, well isolated and secluded. As described by Maspero (1903, vol. 1, p. 39), "Its rounded masses of compact foliage are so wide-spreading that a single tree in the distance may give the impression of several grouped together; and its shade is dense, and impenetrable to the sun." The sycomore not only provided cool, deep shade and seclusion but actively participated in lovers' *rendezvous*. The tree can speak and conspire, as we can see in some selections (arranged by the author) from Egyptian love poetry (Kaster, 1968; Gothein, 1928).

GIRL:

Hurriedly scampers my heart when I recall my love of you—
It does not allow me to go about like other mortals—
It seems to have been uprooted from its place.
It doesn't even let me put on my tunic or even take my fan—
I am not able to paint my eyes or anoint myself with perfume,
"Don't linger thus! Get back to yourself!"

I say when I think of him.
'Don't cause me silly pain, O my heart
Why do you play the madman?
Just sit cool and he'll come to you and everyone will see!
Let not people say of me
'There's a girl fallen hopelessly in love!'
Stand firm when you think of him,
O my heart! don't bound about so!"

BOY:

Seven days I have not seen my sweetheart
A sickness has crept into me; my limbs have become heavy and my body does not know itself.
Even should the master physicans come to me, my heart would not be soothed by their remedies.

As for the magician-priests, there is no resource in them; my illness cannot be diagnosed.
 But say to me "Here she is!"—that will make me live again!
 Her name is what will revive me; the coming and going of her messengers is what will give life to
 my heart.
 She is better for me than a whole pharmacy!
 For me her coming would be the Sound Eye of Horus!
 When I see her I am well; when she opens her eyes, my limbs are young again;
 When she speaks, then I am strong; when I embrace her, she banishes evil from me.
 But, I have not seen her for seven days!

THE SYCOMORE:

O! little sycomore, which she planted with her own hand,
 She moves her lips to speak. How fair are her lovely branches!
 She is laden with fruits that are redder than jasper,
 Her shade is cool, she lays a little letter in a girl's hand.
 The head gardener's daughter; she bids her hasten to her lover:
 "Come and stay among my maidens, we are drunken if we would go to thee,
 Ah, before we have tasted anything, the servants who obey thee
 Are coming with their vessels; beer of every kind they bring
 And every kind of bread, many flowers of today and yesterday
 And all refreshing fruits. Come and make it fine today, [and]
 Tomorrow and next day, three days long—Sit in my shade!"
 Her friend sits on her right hand; she makes him drunk
 And yields to what he wishes—
 But I am dumb, and say not what I see;
 I will not say a word!

GIRL:

My god, my lover, my husband—
 How sweet it is to go down to the lotus pond and do as you desire—
 to plunge into the waters, and bathe before you—
 to let you see my beauty in my tunic of sheerest royal linen,
 all wet and clinging and perfumed with balsam!
 I go down into the water to be with you
 and come up again to you with a red fish
 lying so fine and splendid within my fingers
 and place it upon my breast—
 O, sweetheart! look and see!

BOY:

I see my sweetheart coming—
 My heart is in joy, and my arms are opened wide to embrace her;
 And my heart rejoices within me without ceasing
 Come to me, O my mistress!
 When I embrace her and her arms enlace me,
 it is as if I were in the Land of the Gods [Punt] drenched in her fragrance!
 When I kiss her with her lips parted Ah, then I am drunk without beer!

GIRL:

Is there anything sweeter than this hour?
 for I am with you, and you lift up my heart—
 for is there not embracing and fondling when you visit me
 and we give ourselves up to delights?
 If you wish to caress my thigh, then I will offer you my breast also—
 it won't push you away!

Would you leave because you are hungry?
 —are you such a man of your belly?
 Would you leave because you need something to wear?
 —I have a chestfull of fine linen!
 Would you leave because you wish something to drink?
 —Here take my breasts! They are full to overflowing and all for you!
 Glorious is the day of our embracing;
 I treasure it a hundred thousand millions!

It is not possible to read Egyptian love poetry and still think of the ancient Egyptians as stiff little figures walking across the tomb walls. They were *real, live*, flesh and blood people who *celebrated* sex and romance.

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CELIBACY OR CONSUMMATION IN THE GARDEN?
REFLECTIONS ON EARLY JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN
INTERPRETATIONS OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN

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The interpretation of Adam and Eve's sexual life was a matter of some concern for early Jewish and Christian exegetes. As Louis Ginzberg observed, several Jewish pseudepigraphical works as well as the writings of many of the early Church Fathers "presuppose that not only the birth of the children of Adam and Eve took place after the expulsion from paradise (Gen 4:1ff), but that the first 'human pair' lived in paradise without sexual intercourse."¹ The reasons for such an exegesis are not difficult to discern. The Garden of Eden was not simply a story about the primeval world; it could also function as a metaphor for the world-to-come.² Hence the Garden was a paradigm for the ideal world of the eschaton, a world one should attempt to actualize or bring into existence now. Because Christians believed that the next world was devoid of marriage (Luke 20:27–40), it followed that the Garden was as well. In addition to this reason, Christians were also exhorted to abstain from marriage as a concession to the apocalyptic ferment of the present world (1 Corinthians 7).

¹Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (7 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1908–38) 5. 134 n 4. Among those he cites are 2 Bar. 56.6, *The Life of Adam and Eve* 18, and *Jub.* 4.1. For a variant understanding of *Jubilees* see the discussion below. *The Life of Adam and Eve* is also problematic for Ginzberg. The text Ginzberg cites (chap. 18) declares that Eve was three months pregnant at some unspecified time after the expulsion. But, if one adds up the time taken by the events which took place after the expulsion in the first seventeen chapters, Adam and Eve are said to have been out of the Garden for only sixty-three days. If the chronology within the book can be taken seriously, then sexual relations had to take place in the Garden. One might also note that after their expulsion, Adam and Eve began to mourn. The ritual state of mourning entails sexual abstinence making it more unlikely that the pregnancy described in chap. 18 could have resulted from a post-expulsion coital act.

²This was especially true in early Syriac Christianity which did not include Revelation in its canon.

Rabbinic Judaism, on the other hand, did not have a high regard for the celibate condition. One midrashic text compares the celibate individual to one who impairs God's image and, even worse, to a murderer.³ The act of human procreation was not simply an acceptable act, it was a commanded act. It is the subject of the very first command God gives men and women: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). It should come as no surprise, then, that in rabbinic exegesis the Garden was the location of humankind's first sexual encounter.

The disagreement between Jews and Christians over the theological value of the celibate state was not limited to intellectuals. As Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* show, the issue was an important one among common Jews and Christians as well. Aphrahat describes the ridicule Christians often received from Jews in regard to this issue. As he describes it, the Jews argue that divine blessing and procreation are inseparable themes in the Bible (*Dem.* 18.1).⁴ To abstain from procreation is to live in isolation from divine blessing. God blessed Adam (Gen 1:28), Noah (9:7), and Abraham (15:5) and in each case the blessing resulted in progeny. Moreover, one of the prominent features of the promised land is its fertility. As the Torah promises, there shall be no barren women in Israel (Exod 23:26; Deut 7:14). The association of the themes land, blessing, and fertility in this text of Aphrahat sounds like an authentic Jewish position. In the discussion below we will see these themes all come together in the *b. Ketub.* 8a. In another section of his polemic against the Jews (18.12), Aphrahat declares that one Jew has asserted that Christians are unclean because they do not take wives. He writes:

I have written to you, my beloved, concerning virginity and holiness (*qaddiṣūtā*) because I heard about a Jewish man who has reviled one of our brethren, the members of the church (*bnay ʿi(d)tā*). He said to him, "You are impure (*tamm'in*) for you don't take wives. But we are holy (*qaddiṣin*) and more virtuous for we bear children and multiply seed in the world."⁵

Aphrahat's understanding of holiness (*qaddiṣin*) is significant. He correctly distinguishes the Jewish understanding of the term, as reflected in rabbinic documentation, from the Christian. Jews understood the term to refer to the state of marriage.⁶ Syriac Christians understood the term to refer to sexual continence. Aphrahat's identification of sexual abstinence with uncleanness might seem unusual. The Rabbis never placed the sexually abstinent individual in the legal

³*Gen. Rab.* 34:14. The edition cited is that of J. Theodor and H. Albeck, *Genesis Rabbah* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1965).

⁴For the text, see *Patrologia Syriaca* (ed. J. Parisot; 3 vols.; Paris: Firmin-Didot et Socii, 1894) 1. 817.1–820.18.

⁵*Patrologia Syriaca*, 1. 841.3–9.

⁶The term is also the title of the Mishnaic tractate concerning marriage law.

category of unclean.⁷ Perhaps the usage of uncleanness here reflects an extended metaphorical definition rather than a technical legal designation. In summary, the issues Aphrahat raises in regard to the Jewish position appear authentic and anticipate the issues to be discussed below.

As one would expect, both the Rabbis and the early Christians attempted to establish their views about the role of sexual experiences in the Garden on the basis of a close reading of the biblical narrative. The questions with which we are concerned are these: on what exegetical bases were these decisions made? are the exegetical processes at all related? and can one date one particular exegetical result as earlier than another? The last concern was treated by Ginzberg. He argued that in the earliest evidence of Jewish exegetical reflection, Adam and Eve lived in paradise without sexual experience. Indeed, this view can be found in some pre-rabbinic Jewish works. For example in 2 Bar. 56.5–6, it is said that the conception of children and the passion of parents came about as a result of the transgression of Adam. According to Ginzberg, this position, originally of Jewish origin, was adopted by Christians. Christians took this position because it understands sexual knowledge to be a result of human sin. Once this position became an identifiably Christian one, rabbinic thinkers reacted and opposed this position by creating a tradition of marriage in the Garden.⁸ For Ginzberg, the central concern in the history of the exegesis is the sin of Adam and Eve and their consequent expulsion, a sequence of events Christians identify as the “fall.” My intention is to determine if Ginzberg is right as to the relatively late date of the rabbinic concept of sexual relations in the Garden and to ascertain whether the sin of Adam is the dominant exegetical concern regarding sexual relations in the Garden.

JEWISH MATERIALS

Sexual Consummation in the Garden

Rabbinic materials presume that Adam and Eve were married and consummated their marriage in the Garden of Eden. But the rabbinic materials do not make this exegetical claim in a general manner. As Joseph Heinemann has shown, exegetical themes like this one usually develop around a particular text or pair of texts which for some reason or another appear problematic to the reader of the Bible.⁹ The solution to this problem or problems is usually accomplished by the creation of an aggadic narrative which fills in some “implied”

⁷The only exception to this would be the mourner who was abstinent for seven days. But the mourner's uncleanness was not caused by the absence of sexual activity alone.

⁸This position is argued in Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 5, 134 n. 4 and in idem, *Die Haggada bei den Kirchenvätern und in der apokryphischen Literatur* (Berlin: Calvary, 1900) 57–58.

⁹Joseph Heinemann, *Aggādōt wē-Tōlēdōtēhen* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974). See also James Kugel, “Two Introductions to Midrash,” *Prooftexts* 3 (1981) 131–55.

background information within the text. Though aggada often begins with this type of close reading, the textual origin of a particular aggada can be forgotten and “erroneously” reattached to new texts or be assumed in the exegesis of other texts. In tracing the tradition history of a piece of aggada, one must not only collect all the examples of it, but one must also attempt to locate the particular verse or set of verses in which it originates.¹⁰

In order to clarify the point of origin of this motif, it will be helpful to mention several exegetical texts which presume the sexual union of Adam and Eve in the Garden.

“And the woman said unto the serpent . . . ” (Gen 3:2). Now where was Adam during this conversation? Abba Halfon b. Qoriah said: “He had engaged in sex and then fell asleep.” (*Gen. Rab.* 19:3)

“And they were both naked (*‘arummîm*) . . . Now the serpent was the most subtle (*‘arûm*) . . . ” (Gen 2:24–3:1). [Why is the snake episode interpolated here and why are the Hebrew words naked and subtle the subject of a word play?] They indicate for what sinful purpose the snake was anxious to do this thing. He had seen them engaging in sex and developed a passion for her. (*Gen. Rab.* 18:6)

The verse “he built the rib . . . into a woman and led her to him” (Gen 2:22) is understood as a description of the first marriage ceremony. The act of “building” is understood as God’s adornment of the bride (*Gen. Rab.* 18:1),¹¹ and the act of leading is understood as God’s acting as Adam’s groomsman or *šôšbîn* (*Gen. Rab.* 18:3). The precious stones of Eden (Ezek 28:13) are described as the extraordinary *huppâ* under which Adam and Eve were married. There is a definite logical progression implied in these midrashim. In Gen 2:22 God adorns Eve, prepares the *huppâ* and presents the bride to Adam. By the time the snake arrives, just a couple of verses later, Adam and Eve have made love and Adam has gone to sleep (Gen 3:1–2). On the basis of what lies before us, we can see that this union must have occurred before the encounter with the snake and (obviously) after the presentation of Eve to Adam.

¹⁰Indeed, as Heinemann has demonstrated, it can be helpful to begin a tradition-historical investigation of an exegetical theme with the rabbinic materials and then work back through earlier pseudepigraphical works. This is because the rabbinic materials will often single out the particular textual problem(s) that led to the creation of a supplementary tradition. For a good example of this, see James L. Kugel’s treatment of the tradition of Joseph’s handsome appearance in the work *Joseph and Asenath* in idem and Rowan A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 96–102. The exegetical foundations of the full-blown narrative tradition that is found in this work cannot be appreciated apart from Targumic and rabbinic sources.

¹¹This motif is also present in Targum Neophyti and the Fragmentary Targum.

This leads to the text in question. In Gen 2:23–24 we read the following response of Adam to his new wife Eve:

²³Then God brought her to Adam and he said: “*zōt happa’am*, bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman because she was taken out of a man.” ²⁴Therefore a man leaves his father . . .”

Modern translations of the phrase *zōt happa’am* are very similar. The *RSV* and *JB* read, “this, at last,” the *NEB* “now this, at last,” and the *JPS*, “this one, at last.” But these similar translations mask several interpretive problems. Just how are *zōt* and *happa’am* related, what antecedent act do they refer to, and how are they related to the following etiology of marriage (vs 24)? Modern translators and commentators have understood *happa’am* as a reference to something which has happened after a long period of expectation, so the emphasis on the “at-lastness” of the event. Such a usage can be paralleled in Gen 29:34, 35; 30:20; and 46:30. In fact, the first three texts involve acts of successful procreation. In these cases the expression is simply *happa’am* with the article *ha-* having the force of the demonstrative pronoun “this”; Gen 2:23 is a more emphatic rendering of this idea because it also appends the demonstrative pronoun (somewhat redundantly?) to the phrase.

The Targum translated *zōt* as though it were used attributively, *hādā zimnā*, “this time.”¹² Targum Neophyti and Ps.-Jonathan clarify what is so emphatically important and novel about this occasion.

This time *and never again* will a woman be created from a man as this one was created from me (italics = midrashic explanation)

This understanding is also found in the *Abot de Rabbi Nathan* (B) (hereafter, *ARNB*):

When Adam saw Eve he said: “This is my mate.” As scripture says, “And Adam said: ‘This at last is bone of my bones’” (Gen 2:23). [Meaning] this one time, woman was created from man; from now on a man takes the daughter of his fellow and is commanded to be fruitful and multiply. [Another interpretation:] This one time God acted as groomsman for Adam; from now on he must get one for himself.¹³

¹²The word order is unusual. Generally, when the demonstrative pronoun is used attributively, it follows the noun it modifies. This is true in Hebrew as in Targumic Aramaic; it is not quite as regular in Syriac. In this case, if the demonstrative pronoun is used attributively, its placement before the noun is clearly unusual and emphatic. The emphatic quality of the phrase asks for some sort of interpretation. What is so dramatic about “this (very) time?”

¹³The selection is taken from chap. 8. For the best edition, see Solomon Schechter, ed., *Abot de Rabbi Nathan* (1887; reprinted New York: Feldheim, 1967). One should also note the translation

Both the Targumim and *ANRB* understand *happa'am* as an act of singular importance, an act which occurred just once and will not be repeated. This interpretation is not without biblical parallels. The term *happa'am* can have exactly this force in Gen 18:32; Exod 10:17; Judg 6:39; 16:28. The midrash is clarifying just what was so singular about this presentation of Eve to Adam in the Garden. (This text also solves the problem of *when* God commanded Adam to be fruitful and multiply.)¹⁴

One other exegetical tradition does focus on the "at-lastness" of the phrase. This tradition, attributed to R. Eleazar, is found in *b. Yeb.* 63a and was adopted by Rashi as the most sensible reading of the text.

zō'tappa'am. This teaches that Adam attempted to have sex with all the beasts and animals but his sexual desire ("knowledge") was not cooled off by them.

Behind this midrash is a juxtaposition of Gen 2:18–20 and Gen 2:23–24. The latter verses describe Adam's reaction to his mate while the former describe the rather peculiar circumstances that brought about her creation. These circumstances need to be cited.

¹⁸And the Lord God said: "It is not good for Adam to be alone, I will make a helper like him. ¹⁹Thereupon the Lord God formed from the ground every beast of the field and bird of the skies and brought them to Adam to see what he would name them. Every name Adam gave a living thing, that was its name. ²⁰And Adam named all the cattle, the birds of the skies and the beasts of the field. But in respect to Adam himself, he did not find a helper like him.

and commentary of Anthony J. Saldarini, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Natan* (SJLA 11; Leiden: Brill, 1975).

¹⁴*Gen. Rab.* 18:4 moves in other directions:

And Adam said: "*zō'tappa'am* . . ." R. Judah b. Rabbi said: "At first he created her for him and he saw her full of discharge and blood; thereupon he removed her from him and created her a second time. Hence he said "*this time* she is bone of my bones," [meaning] this woman is [the creation] of this [second] time.

[Another interpretation:] This is she who is destined to strike the bell and to speak against me, as you read, "A golden bell" (Exod 28:34, bell = *pa'amôn*).

[Another interpretation:] It is she who troubled me (*mēpa'amtānī*) all night . . .

Resh Laqish was asked: "Why do not all other dreams exhaust a man, yet this [dream about a woman] does exhaust a man?" He replied: "Because from the very beginning of her creation she was but in a dream."

Each of these interpretations takes a different perspective on the phrase *zō'tappa'am*. Only the last is overtly sexual but it does not presume in any way an actual sexual union. It should be noted that the last two interpretations are farther removed from the grammatical problem of the phrase. Rather than focusing on the "at-lastness" or "singularity" of the event, they fancifully interpret *happa'am* as though it were a common noun ("bell") or verb ("to trouble").

The important sequence is that of vss 18–19a and 20b. In vs 18 God makes the observation that Adam is alone and needs a helper. Then, as if in response to this mental intention, God creates the animals! In the end, Adam is still alone. The subject of the verb “to find” in 20b is somewhat ambiguous. Most modern translators have understood it as an impersonal 3 m.s.: “and a helper was not found for Adam.” But an equally probable subject, especially in light of God’s stated intention in 18a, is God: “and God did not find a helper for him.” One theological problem with this translation is that it makes God look less than perfect in the work of creation. Another problem is that it does not help illuminate Adam’s cry in 2:23, “this one, at last.” This cry presumes that *Adam* is the one in search of a mate, *not God*. In order for that cry to make sense, Adam must come to learn of his need for a mate in 2:20 and so Adam must be made the subject of the verb “to find.” Once Adam is understood as the subject, then the presentation of the animals in vss 19–20a can be understood in a fashion that does justice to the Godhead. No longer is God creating the animals in an attempt to find a mate for Adam, rather by way of this creation Adam will learn on his own of this need. This “education of Adam” is brought out in the following midrashim:

“And Adam named all the cattle . . .” [This verse teaches that] while he was calling each one by its proper name, he noticed them copulating each with its mate and he couldn’t figure out what they were doing because the feeling of erotic attraction had as yet no power over him for scripture says: “But Adam himself did not find a mate like himself.”¹⁵

Then he paraded [the animals] again [after the naming] before him in pairs. Adam said: “Everyone has a mate except me!” (*Gen. Rab.* 17:4).¹⁶

The understanding of *zōt happa’am* as a reference to Adam’s finally finding a sexual partner and “knowing” her explains the chronology of marriage in the Garden as it develops in the other midrashic sources about Eden. If this exegesis of *zōt happa’am* was ancient, then the rest of the aggadic developments we traced above would all follow quite logically as an elaboration of this sexual scene. The verses which precede would describe the preparations for marriage (adornment of Eve, God as groomsman, description of *huppâh*) and the verses which follow would describe its consequences (Adam’s absence in 3:2, Satan’s

¹⁵This is taken from *Midrash ha-Gadol*. See the edition of Eliyahu Rabinowitz (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1932). Also note that Josephus *Ant.* 34–35 understands this scene in a very similar fashion.

¹⁶Ps.-Jonathan probably reflects a similar understanding. It translates vs 20 as “He had not found up to this point a mate like himself.” This Targum follows the Hebrew rather literally except for the addition “up to this point.” The most obvious explanation of this addition is the clarity it provides for Adam’s subsequent cry in 2:23, “this time, at last!”

jealousy). One problem with this reconstruction is that *Genesis Rabbah* does not include this exegetical tradition even though it presumes sexual relations in the Garden. But this is not an insoluble problem. Heinemann has provided many examples of how a specific exegetical source for an aggadic narrative can be forgotten in the subsequent elaboration of a particular narrative theme.¹⁷

In order to prove decisively the antiquity of this tradition we must turn to the book of *Jubilees*.

And Adam named all of [the animals], each one according to its name, and whatever he called them became their names. *And during these five days Adam was observing all of these, male and female according to every kind which was on the earth, but he was alone* and there was none whom he found for himself, who was like himself, who would help him. And the Lord said to us, "It is not good that man should be alone. Let us make a helper who is like him." And the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon him, and he slept . . .

And [God] brought her to him *and he knew her* and said to her, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one will be called my wife because she was taken from her husband. (*Jub. 3.2–5a, 6, italics indicate significant additions to the biblical text*)¹⁸

This text is remarkable in several ways. It places the act of sexual consummation exactly where R. Eleazar (*b. Yeb. 63a*) put it, and like R. Eleazar, it also understands Gen 2:19c–20 to be a narrative wherein Adam learns of his need for a sexual partner. God's creation of the animals is not a mistaken attempt at finding a partner for Adam; rather it is an instructive event which informs Adam of his incompleteness and need for a mate. The instructive quality of the event is made quite clear by the lengthy interpolation put into this sequence. For five days Adam observes the animals in pairs; only then does he (not God!) see his need for a mate. Thereupon God steps forward to provide this mate. As a result of this interpretation, 2:18 is moved down and placed before 2:21. This solves the problem of God setting the animals before Adam as though they were to be his helper. Adam's recognition of his need and then the provision of this need leads to his own sexual union ("and he knew her") and the logical explanation of the cry, "this time, at long last!" Thus the text of *Jubilees*, which is generally dated to the second century BCE, shows the antiquity of this exegetical motif.

¹⁷Heinemann (*ʿAggādôt wē-Tôlêdôtêhen*) has shown time and again how an early cause for a particular aggadic narrative can be forgotten in the subsequent elaboration of the interpretive theme.

¹⁸The text is *Jub. 3.2–5a, 6*. The translation is that of O. Wintermute in *OTP* 2. 58–59.

The concept of sexual relations before the expulsion from the Garden is a very ancient theme which originated as an exegetical solution to Adam's problematic exclamation. But the movement from *Jubilees* to rabbinic midrash is not as simple as it may appear. For the Rabbis took this piece of exegesis concerning Adam's exclamation and made it the basis for a larger narrative concerning the marriage rite *within* the Garden. *Jubilees* does something much different. The book of *Jubilees* has Adam and Eve meeting one another before their entry into the Garden. Thus, their initial sexual encounter occurs *outside* the Garden. Only after forty days can Adam enter the Garden and Eve must wait eighty days. These numbers reflect the days of purification which Leviticus 12 requires for those who have just given birth to children. The situation in *Jubilees* does not quite fit the model of Leviticus 12, for Adam and Eve have had no children yet and will not have any until they are expelled from the Garden. But their own creation has become a model for the rite of purification enjoined on all subsequent parents.

Garden and Temple

The point of the *Jubilees* narrative is this: Eden is conceived of as a holy site—indeed, it is more holy than any other spot—and those who enter its environs must be pure. Though Eden is not said to be a Temple in this particular narrative, its Temple attributes are clear from the description of Eden in *Jubilees* 4.23–26. In this section, Eden is the location to which Enoch is taken so that he might survive the flood. Eden is conceived of as a cosmic mountain which the flood waters were not able to overcome. *Jubilees* ascribes the reason for this as due to the purity of Enoch. He was unique among his generation in not consorting with the Watchers, thus his pure condition made him worthy of re-entry into Eden. While in Eden, Enoch offered incense and so provides ample evidence that Eden was thought of in terms of Temple images. With respect to Adam's knowing Eve, it should now be clear why it had to occur outside of Eden. Sexual emissions rendered the person unclean (Lev 15:18) and unfit to eat the sacred food of the Temple (Lev 22:4–7). In rabbinic literature, the danger of sexual impurity necessitated the sequestering of the High Priest from his spouse for the week prior to Yom-Kippur (*m. Yoma* 1.1). For the author of *Jubilees*, it was not an esteem for the celibate state, nor an extreme form of ascetical piety which required that sex not take place in the Garden. Rather, the author is simply building on the biblical motif of purity within the Temple.

The book of *Jubilees* also outlaws sexual activity on the Sabbath as well (50.8). This is certainly no accident. The creation of Sabbath, in the description of the P writer (Gen 2:1–3), was comparable to the creation of the Tent-shrine/Temple.¹⁹ The similarities between the Sabbath and Temple were further

¹⁹See Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: Harper &

developed in postbiblical literature. Like the Temple, the Sabbath day was characterized by rest; only the work required for Temple sacrifices was allowable on it. *Jubilees* emphasizes these dimensions as well. By concluding the work with a lengthy peroration on the meaning of the Sabbath and its legal requirements, the writer not only emphasizes its importance, he highlights its eschatological significance. The Sabbath is said to be "a day of the holy kingdom for all Israel" (50:9). This particular phrase calls to mind the image of a restored political Israel; the term "holy kingdom" in sectarian Jewish literature was not a spiritual concept.²⁰ This phrase portrays the Sabbath as a foretaste of the eschatological era when Israel would return to her status as a world empire. *Jubilees* also raises the Sabbath to the rank of a (Temple-) festival, and like those festivals, all Israel is commanded to eat and drink on that day (50.9–10). Fasting is strictly forbidden, just as it was on feast days of the Temple (50.12–13). And sexual relations, because they are forbidden within the Temple, are also forbidden on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a means of actualizing, in a non-Temple environment, the requirements of Temple existence.²¹

Row, 1985) 142–45. He argues that just as the Temple serves to mark out sacred space and is a place of rest (*mēnûhâh*), so the Sabbath serves to mark out sacred time and serves as a period of rest. The correspondences between the creation of the world and the erection of a holy shrine can be seen in these texts, all from the hand of P: Gen 2:1–2 and Exod 39:32; 40:33b–34; Gen 1:31 and Exod 39:43; Gen 2:3 and Exod 39:43, 40:9. Other biblical scholars have noted these similarities. See M. Weinfeld, "Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord," in A. Caquot and M. Delcor, eds., *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Henri Cazelles* (AOAT 212; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981) 501–12; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon: A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977) 59–69. On post-biblical developments see Arthur Green, "Sabbath as Temple: Some Thoughts on Space and Time in Judaism," in Raphael Jospe and Samuel Z. Fishman, eds., *Go and Study: Essays and Studies in Honor of Alfred Jospe* (Washington, DC: B'nai B'rith, 1980) 287–305.

²⁰A similar understanding of the kingdom (*malkûtâ* in Aramaic) was present among Syriac writers. As Robert Murray observes (*Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* [London/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975] 239, 241): "The early Syriac Fathers remained too close to their Judaeo-Christian roots to move far from the primitive totally eschatological sense of *malkûtâ* . . . [*M*] *malkûtâ* is sovereignty in this world under God's governance; he gave it once to Israel and now he has given it to the Romans. It may be a title of supremacy, but it is not the Church."

²¹Safrai (S. Safrai and M. Stern, eds., *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural, and Religious Life and Institutions* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976] 2. 205) has asserted that an even stricter position was advocated by the early *ḥasidîm*. He claims that they not only "forbade marital relations on the Sabbath, [but] even remained continent from the preceding Wednesday, so that the woman need not be ritually impure on the Sabbath eve by reason of some residue from intercourse." One should note, though, that this assertion is dependent on the assumption that the Babylonian Amoraim have misunderstood an early extra-Mishnaic saying from the tannaitic period (*baraita*). The particular *baraita* is cited in *b. Nid.* 38a and declares that sexual relations were forbidden after Wednesday by the early *ḥasidîm*. The Amoraic discussion of the *baraita* presumes that the reason is based on the calculation of the gestation period of a woman. If one had sex after Wednesday the birth might fall on the Sabbath day. L. Finkelstein (*MGWJ* 76

Rabbinic literature diverges from the strict legal prescriptions found in *Jubilees* just as it diverges from *Jubilees'* treatment of Eden. In contrast to the law of sexual continence in *Jubilees*, rabbinic law enthusiastically enjoined marital relations on the Sabbath.²² What is curious is that the Rabbis, like the author of *Jubilees*, articulated the rules for Sabbath purity in terms of a model which pertains to the (Temple-) feast day.²³ But the Rabbis diverge strikingly from the model found in *Jubilees* by not generalizing the strict norms for existence within the sacred space of the Temple itself (where a recent sexual emission would render one impure) to the Sabbath.²⁴

How can we account for this unexpected decision? Why do the Rabbis ignore the laws of purity in constructing their picture of Eden? There are at least two reasons for this exegetical choice and both are rooted in the concept of restoration.

Eden and the Age of Eschatological Joy

In the restoration literature of the postexilic and post-70 periods, the awaited New Age was described as one of joy while the present age was described as one of mourning. These images of joy in the *Endzeit* soon became images of the primordial *Urzeit*. As will become clear in the discussion below, this movement from mourning to joy was not simply, or even primarily, an emotional transformation; rather it was a behavioral or even ritual transformation. Just as the state

[1932] 529–30) argued that the *baraita* reflected an earlier, more ascetic branch of Judaism that abstained from sexual relations for three days prior to the Sabbath so as not to enter that holy day in an unclean state. The figure of three days presumably stems from Exod 19:10, 15. This perspective fell out of favor in the rabbinic period, and so the *halakha* found in this *baraita* was subject to reinterpretation.

²²So *b. Ketub.* 62b, *b. B. Qama* 82a, and *p. Ketub.* 5.6.

²³E.g., see *m. M. Qatan* 3.6.

²⁴The discussion of what constitutes purity on the festival day or Sabbath is framed in different terms altogether: the laws which pertain to the mourner. The mourner is a suitable model for comparison because the discrete ritual activities which define the mourner are also actions which render one unclean. Thus priests, who must be available for service within the Temple, are restricted as to whom they can mourn (Lev 21:1–6). Moreover, the high priest was not allowed to mourn for anyone, presumably so that he would always be available for cultic service (Lev 21:10–12). The impure state of the mourner is not simply a biblical idea. As Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf illustrate (*Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979] 64–65), the mourning period is a time of impurity in many cultures. The ritual movement from mourning to joy in the Bible or in rabbinic materials was also a movement from an impure state to a pure one. The Talmud, in fact, explicitly compares the state of the impure leper to that of the mourner (*b. M. Qatan* 15b). There is one peculiarity about the movement from impurity to purity in the case of the mourner. The movement from mourning to joy allows for the *resumption* of sexual relations as part of the ritual process. The resumption of sexual relations as a symbolic action denoting the end of mourning can be seen in numerous Semitic materials.

of mourning is characterized by specific behaviors which are assumed by the mourner, so the state of joy.

Six benedictions spoken over the bride and groom in the rabbinic wedding rite are found in the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Ketubot*. The literary context in which they are found is a *baraita* which states that a set of blessings must be said before ten people during seven days of the marriage celebration. Rab Judah then recites his own formulation of these blessings. As Heinemann has shown, the form of these blessings could vary from one recital to another and some variant formulations have survived.²⁵ But the variants are variants in detail, not in gross structure. Because of the conservative tendencies in the oral transmission of these forms of prayer, it is safe to assume that the six blessings Rab Judah, a third-century Amora, cites had a long prehistory.

1. Blessed are you O Lord Our God, King of the Universe, who has created everything for his glory.
2. [Blessed are you O Lord Our God, King of the Universe,] creator of humankind.
3. [Blessed are you O Lord Our God, King of the Universe,] who created humankind in his image, in the image of the likeness of his form. And has prepared for him from his very own person an eternal "building" (*binyān*), blessed are you O Lord creator of man.
4. May you be glad and exultant O barren one when her children are gathered to her with joy. Blessed are you Lord who makes Zion joyful with her children.
5. May you make joyful these beloved companions just as you made your creatures in the Garden of Eden in primordial times (*miqqedem*, see Gen 2:8). Blessed are you O Lord, who makes bridegroom and bride rejoice.
6. Blessed are you O Lord Our God, King of the Universe, who created mirth and joy, bridegroom and bride, gladness, jubilation, dancing and delight, love and brotherhood, peace and fellowship. Quickly, O Lord Our God, may the sound of mirth and joy be heard in the streets of Judah and Jerusalem, the voice of bridegroom and bride, jubilant voices of bridegrooms from their canopies and youths from the feasts of song. Blessed are you O Lord who makes the bridegroom rejoice with the bride.

Rashi attempts to discern what is the difference between the two formulations of joy in the fifth and sixth benedictions. He believes the phrase "who makes the bridegroom *and* bride rejoice" (fifth benediction) refers to general rejoicing apart from the wedding itself (*šimḥat bēṛākāh hā-rišōnāh lō' bē-šimḥat ḥātunnāh*), while the phrase "who makes the bridegroom rejoice *with* the

²⁵Joseph Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud: Forms and Patterns* (New York: De Gruyter, 1977). His work includes a table of variants for the fourth and fifth blessings, see pp. 74, 290.

bride" (sixth benediction) refers to the specific pleasures of the wedding event, one of which would include the moment of "marital coupling" (*ḥāṭunnat dībbūq*). The commentator R. Isaiah de Trani (early thirteenth century) paraphrases the sixth benediction as "he who created the joy of coupling." Both of these commentators are drawing on a meaning of the term "joy" that is found throughout the rabbinic literature as well as in other Semitic languages of the ancient Near East (Hebrew, Jewish Aramaic, Syriac, and Akkadian).²⁶ In these languages, the term "joy" is not so much a general term of emotional pleasure, but rather a term which connotes particular pleasures associated with the observation of specific rituals. In particular, the pleasures that are most characteristic of the experience of joy are those which stand in typological contrast to those of mourning. Thus, just as mourning consists of fasting, rending the garments, putting dust on the head, and sexual continence, so the experience of joy included eating and drinking, putting on festal attire, anointing oneself with oil and bathing, and sexual union. Many restoration texts speak of the inbreaking of joy in the New Age and so convey the idea that this joy will mark the end of the present period of grief and mourning.²⁷ One particularly prominent display of joy was the marriage ceremony because of the presence of great feasting and dancing as well as the sexual union of the couple.

Many Semitic texts presume this understanding of the term. For example, when Gilgamesh is exhorted by the Alewife to stop his mourning over Enkidu she commands him "to rejoice in the lap/groin of his wife."²⁸ A close structural parallel to this can be found in *Jubilees*. In one text, after Adam and Eve have completed their mourning over Abel, it is said that "they rejoiced and then Adam knew Eve" (*Jub.* 4.7). One should note that both these texts understand the experience of sexual joy to be a ritual marker of the end of mourning. This may illuminate why the Rabbis chose the concerns of the mourner as the means

²⁶The use of joy in these various languages is developed in considerable detail in my forthcoming book on the terms for joy in the Semitic languages.

²⁷E.g., note Isa 25:9; 62:5; 66:10; Joel 2:21, 23; Zeph 3:14; and Zech 2:4. The close association of this eschatological joy with the cultic feast has been observed by Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch* (SVTP 7; Leiden: Brill, 1985) 115–16. The same point has been made about the use of the term "joy" in the kingdom preaching of Jesus. See Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (London: SCM, 1958) 63 n. 4.

²⁸This line has been found only in the Old Babylonian recension (B. Meissner, *Ein altbabylonisches Fragment des Gilgamesepos* (MVAG 7(1); Berlin: Peiser, 1902) iii:13). The Assyrian recension is broken at this point. I include the rather crude reference to "groin" simply to drive home the point that the reference is explicitly sexual in the Akkadian. The understanding of this passage has been hindered by Speiser's more euphemistic rendering (in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* [3d ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969] 90) of "bosom." Note also the Akkadian idiom: *uṣṣam epēšu*, literally "to do a joy," idiomatically "to make love." The same root of *uṣṣam* (‘-l-ṣ) is employed in the Samaritan Targum with this force. Gen 2:24, "he shall cleave to his wife," is rendered "he shall rejoice with his wife."

by which they would articulate the requirement for purity on the feast day and Sabbath. The mourner's movement from impurity to purity included the unexpected movement from sexual abstinence to sexual joy.²⁹

The halakhic function of the term "rejoice" is well illustrated in Targum Ps.-Jonathan's treatment of the exemptions from holy war found in Deut 20:5–7. The last exemption is rendered "Whoever has betrothed a wife but has not formally taken her [in marriage], let him return to his house lest he bring about his own sin of not rejoicing with his wife." The law of 20:7 has been combined with the similar law found in Deut 24:5. The important thing to observe is that rejoicing with one's wife was understood as consummation of marriage.

Another important legal usage of marital joy is found in *b. B. Bat.* 144b–145a. The text deals with obligations involved in receiving betrothal gifts. The specific problem under discussion pertains to a woman who receives gifts from her prospective husband, but he dies before the marriage can be consummated. She is not obligated to return the gifts to the husband's family. Her obligation was only to him and in regard to that obligation, it was no fault of her own that consummation did not take place. The text reads:

A. And is it not also taught [about returning betrothal gifts in the event of a death before the marriage ceremony: Where it is the custom to return the betrothal gift (*qiddūšîn*), it must be returned; where the custom is not to return, it need not be returned.

B. R. Joseph b. Abba said in the name of Mar Uqba in the name of Samuel: "This applies only to the case where she died, but if he died, it need not be returned."

²⁹The sexual nuance of the term joy is important for interpreting rabbinic discussions of how the mourner was to act on the feast day (*b. M. Qatan* 23b). The ritual requirements of the "joy of the feast" took pride of place. This meant that the mourner had to bathe, put on fresh clothes and scented oil, eat and drink and even (according to some) resume sexual relations. These were the discrete behaviors which constituted the ritual state of joy. The Talmud explicitly states: "A mourner does not deport himself as one in mourning during a festival as scripture says: 'You shall rejoice in the feast' (Deut 16:14)" (*b. M. Qatan* 14b). Because the Sabbath and the feast day were so similar in legal thought, the same type of logic applied to the Sabbath. After the Talmud has cited this proof text from Deuteronomy the text then describes the exact behaviors which are forbidden to the mourner, one of which is sexual relations. As could be expected, some rabbinic authorities made the logical inference that the commandment to rejoice on the festival took such precedence that even the mourner was to resume sexual relations during this period. This is a remarkable assertion because the punishment for the mourner who would have sexual relations during this period was terribly severe (*b. M. Qatan* 24a). Some rabbinic authorities even allowed sexual relations for the mourner on the Sabbath, though others disagreed (*p. M. Qatan* 3.5; *b. M. Qatan* 23b–24a). The important point to observe in these discussions is the legal framework in which these issues are discussed. These rabbinic texts outline those discrete behaviors which constitute the state of mourning and those which constitute the state of joy and then attempt to reconcile the conflict which arises when the two states might coincide.

C. Why? (That is, why is she not obligated? Though the husband is dead, she could return the gift to his estate. In other words, is her obligation to be understood only to him or to his family which provided the funds for the betrothal gift?)

Because she can say: "Give me my husband and I will rejoice with him."

As Rashi indicates, her invitation to rejoice with her potential husband refers to the act of consummating the marriage. Her legal obligation at betrothal is to consummate a marriage with him;³⁰ she is not obligated to the family. Since her failure to rejoice with him—to consummate the marriage—was not her fault, she can keep the gift.

One should keep in mind the technical sense of the term "joy" when reading the blessings in *Ketub*. 8a. As can be seen from *b. B. Bathra*, the joy which is present at the wedding includes both the eating and drinking by the wedding guests, but also the sexual consummation of the marriage. Both types of marital joy are associated with the Garden of Eden. The fifth blessing compares the marital joy of the present age with that of Eden. The second half of the blessing employs vocabulary from the biblical narratives about Eden. The Hebrew word for creatures, *yēšîr*, recalls the role of God as creator (Gen 2:7), and the mention of the Garden existing in primordial times (*miqqedem*) is also an allusion to the diction of the Eden narrative (Gen 2:8). The third benediction uses imagery from Genesis 1 to describe the creation of man, but it also alludes to the creation of woman in Genesis 2. The benediction says that God prepared for Adam "an eternal building" (*binyān 'ādē 'ad*). The obvious referent here is the creation of Eve. This prayer builds upon a midrashic interpretation of Gen 2:22: "And the Lord God *built* (*bānāh*) the rib . . . into a woman." This midrash understands the verb to connote not simply the divine act of creation but also the nature of that creation. Eve is to become more than a partner to Adam; she is to be a pro-

³⁰In rabbinic law, the seclusion of the bride and groom in the *huppā* is not simply the moment of marital intercourse, it is the point of legal acquisition. Note Maimonides' summary: "He who has intercourse with his spouse after betrothal and for the purpose of marriage, acquires her and makes her wedded to him from the moment he initiates intercourse with her, and thereafter she is his wife in every respect." The text is from Isaac Klein, trans., *The Code of Maimonides, Book 4, The Book of Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972) 61. This moment of intercourse under the *huppā* may be presumed in an early Syriac hymn which describes the love of the Bridegroom (Christ?) over the Bride (the Church?). Note the *Odes of Solomon* 42.9: "As the bridechamber (Syriac *gnōnā*) that is spread in the marriage-house, so is my love over those that believe in me." Murray (*Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 132 n. 3) argues that the *gnōnā* is an enclosed tent (like the *huppā*) set up in the house of the bridal pair. If Murray is correct, this tent is most likely the place of sexual consummation as well. The sexual resonances of the *gnōnā* (an important technical term in Syriac theology) has not been explored by Syriac scholars.

pagator, a provider of children.³¹ The emphasis of the blessing rests on the procreative act. It would be an exaggeration to claim that the prayers for joy in *Ketubot* necessarily entail sexual consummation, but the semantic horizon of this term as well as the general concern of these blessings with the themes of procreation and fertility, makes this understanding a possible, if not probable one.

The benedictions also portray marriage as having an eschatological significance. In the sixth blessing, the imagery of Jeremiah is used. He had characterized the era of mourning, or divine curse which was to follow the destruction of the Temple and land, as a time when the sounds of mirth and joy, bridegroom and bride would cease from the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem (Jer 7:34; 16:9; 25:6). By contrast the era of restoration would be characterized by the return of these joyful sounds (Jer 33:10–11). So also the sixth benediction characterizes the end times as one of great marital joy. The theme of marriage was also used by early Christian writers, but there was one major difference: they did not share this enthusiasm for real human marriage in the New Age.³² The image was spiritualized and thought to convey only the mystical marriage of the redeemed to their Savior. The Jewish interest in real human marriage in the New Age is consonant with their perspective that the eschaton would entail a return to a real land and a real Temple.³³ Also prominent in the eschatology of this sixth benediction is the movement from barrenness (curse) to fertility or ingathering (blessing) in the New Age. This is reflected in the fourth benediction. The concept of ingathering is very prominent in restoration texts of the Bible (Isa 54:7; 56:8; Jer 31:10; Ezek 37:21; Zech 10:8).

Eden and the Theological Image of Divine Blessing

The depiction of Eden as a place of marital bliss derives, in part, from the movement of the joy of the *Endzeit* to the *Urzeit*. But there is more here than a simple transference. The very motif of the Garden of Eden, on its own terms, conjures up the imagery of sexuality and procreation. As the recent discovery of the Tel Fekharyeh material shows, the verbal root ʿ-*d-n* has a very prominent association in Northwest Semitic religion with the storm god Baal/Hadad.³⁴ The verbal root refers to the provisionment of fertility and blessing by this god. Late biblical texts make the very same association. In Isa 51:3 and Joel 2:3 the

³¹See Gen 16:2; 30:3 for a similar usage of *bānāh*.

³²See the discussion of Murray, *Symbols and Church and Kingdom*, 137–42.

³³Note that Jerome often mentioned the Jewish expectation of marital joy in the New Age. In his commentary on Isaiah (CCSL 73A; Turnholt: Brepols, 1968), note his comments on Isa 35:3–10 (p. 427), 58:14 (p. 676), and 60:1–3 (p. 693).

³⁴See the discussion in J. Greenfield's article, "A Touch of Eden," in *Orientalia J. Duchesne-Guillemin emrito oblata* (Acta Iranica 23; Leiden: Brill, 1984) 219–24.

phrase "Garden of Eden" refers to the marvelous fertility of the land which divine blessing brings about. Ezekiel also characterizes the repopulated fertile landscape of a restored Israel as an Edenic garden (36:35).

The association of blessing and fertility is not unique to the root 'd-n . The linkage between these two themes exists everywhere in Northwest Semitic religion. It is the very backbone of two of the largest Ugaritic epics (*Aqhat* and *Kirta*) as well as the patriarchal materials in the Bible. Moreover curse and blessing lists in the Bible and extrabiblical sources always highlight the imagery of sexual fertility.³⁵

The root 'd-n can also be used to specify the act of sexual union. The term is used in this fashion in the antediluvian section of the *Genesis Apocryphon*. The text describes the birth of Noah as a rather fantastic event (2.1–3). Evidently the child has an awesome appearance and his father Lamech worries as to whether he is the true father of this child, or if his wife Bitenosh has had an adulterous encounter with the Watchers who descended from heaven. He goes to his wife and implores her to speak truthfully about the matter (2.4–18). Bitenosh begins to address her husband quite vehemently and assures him that he is the true father. Noah's remarkable appearance is due to divine intervention, not to an adulterous relationship with the angelic Watchers. She implores her husband to "recall my pleasure [. . .] my panting within my body" (2.9–10; cf. 2:13–14). The last phrase could be literally rendered "my breath within its sheath." As Fitzmyer noted, "the body is described as a sheath and the panting breath is like a sword moving back and forth within it."³⁶ This image is quite appropriate for a description of sexual intercourse. More important for our purposes is the phrase, "recall my pleasure." The Aramaic term for "my pleasure" is *'dynty*, assuming the root to be 'd-n .³⁷ Some have translated this phrase, "recall my pregnancy," as though the root of *'dynty* were *'dy*. But this cannot be correct. As Fitzmyer observes, though philologically possible, this translation would be logically absurd. Bitenosh is trying to assure Lamech that he is the father. He requires no assurance that there was a pregnancy! Her response only makes sense if it asserts the plausibility of his involvement in the procreative act. Moreover, the translation "sexual pleasure" is consonant with the following image of her panting during the coital act.

As Fitzmyer notes, this translation of *'dynth* as sexual pleasure ought to be compared to the usage of *'ednâh* in Gen 18:12. In this text, Sarah hears the promise made regarding future offspring and laughs. She says, "Now that I am withered up (*bēlōtî*) can I have *'ednâh*, and my lord also is old." Fitzmyer

³⁵E.g., Lev 26:9, 21–22 and Deut 28:4, 18.

³⁶Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1* (2d ed.; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971) 87.

³⁷The form *'dynty* would probably be vocalized *'adîntî*.

would render the term *ʿednâh* as sexual pleasure and compare it with the Aramaic *ʿdynty* found in the *Genesis Apocryphon*. This sense is followed in the RSV, NAB, and JPS translations.³⁸

It is not our point to say that the Rabbis knew this particular text in their exegesis of the Eden narrative. Rather, we have rehearsed this material to show the general associations of the root *ʿ-d-n* with the themes of blessing and fertility from the very earliest Northwest Semitic sources down to those of the postbiblical period. Because late biblical texts had associated the end-time with the return of an era of blessing and fertility, it is altogether natural that the Rabbis would characterize the first-time as the origin of this blessing and fertility.

This expectation becomes a reality in rabbinic materials. In accordance with this, we find many midrashic texts that not only presume a sexual union of Adam and Eve in the Garden but also emphasize the fertile results. Numerous midrashim declare that Adam and Eve “ascended to bed as two and descended from bed as four (or, as some traditions relate, seven).”³⁹ The sexual encounter in Eden was a particularly fruitful one. As is the case in most aggadic expansions of the biblical text, there is an exegetical basis for the tradition. In this case the text is Gen 4:1–2:

And the man had sexual relations with (“knew”) Eve his wife and she conceived and bore Cain, saying: “I have created a man [by means of] the Lord.” She continued to give birth to his brother Abel.

This text has several difficulties, but the two which concern us are the phrases “the man had sexual relations with Eve,” and “she continued to give birth.” The phrase “the man had sexual relations with (literally, “knew”) Eve” has some ambiguity because the Hebrew verb can be translated as both a simple narrative past (“knew”) and as a pluperfect (“had known”). Those midrashim which presume fruitful sexual relations in the Garden parse the verb as a pluperfect. Rashi also adopts this opinion and tries to establish it on grammatical grounds. He asserts that the emphatic word order is a marker of the pluperfect

³⁸Greenfield argues in “A Touch of Eden” that the term ought to be understood differently. He notes the Talmudic text which contrasts the skin of youth (*nirʿaddên*), which is smooth, moist, and fresh, with the skin of old age, which is wrinkled and dry (*nitballâh*) (*b. B. Mesia* 87a). Greenfield also compares this text to the tradition of Jochabed’s miraculous rejuvenation which resulted in the birth of Moses when she was 130-years-old. The text states, “the signs of youth were reborn in her, the flesh was refreshed [*nirʿaddên habbâšâr*], the wrinkles were straightened and beauty returned to its place” (*b. B. Bathra* 120a). The same semantic contrast is found in this text from Genesis. Sarah is old and worn out (*bâlâh*), wonders whether she can become like the young (*ʿdn*). Greenfield believes that Sarah is questioning whether she can achieve the youthful appearance again which is appropriate to child-bearing.

³⁹See, e.g., *b. Sanh.* 38b and *Gen. Rab.* 22:2).

tense.⁴⁰ He is followed by the modern scholar Jeffrey Tigay.⁴¹ It is unlikely that the word order necessitates such a translation; one is on safer ground saying that it is simply a possibility.

The phrase “and she continued to give birth” in Gen 4:2 is also ambiguous. It appears that Gen 4:2 has telescoped the three-fold verbal action of 4:1 (had sex, conceived, gave birth) to the simple statement “she gave birth again.” But how is one to interpret this abbreviated sequence? Is it simply an ellipsis that presumes the actions of sex and conception, or does it indicate a second birthing experience which follows directly from the first? Modern readers have preferred the former as a simpler reading of the text, but the rabbinic reader—sensitive to the fertile nature of Eden—plays on this narrative ambiguity and describes Eve’s first conception as a miraculous one. Not only did she conceive in Eden, but she bore twins (or two brothers and three sisters according to some sources). A late midrashic source even declares that the birth was without pain because of the conception in Eden prior to the transgression and curse.⁴²

The eviction of Adam and Eve from Eden can also be understood in relation to the fertility of Eden. Some rabbinic sources say that Adam goes into mourning upon his expulsion. Thus, as a result of Adam’s ritual state, Eve remains barren for the next 130 years (*Gen. Rab.* 23:4). When the mourning ends, Adam again knows his wife (“rejoices” in *Jub.* 4.7) and Seth is born. This sequence indicates that the movement from Eden to the outside world was a movement from fertility and sexual joy to barrenness, mourning, and sexual continence.

I began this study by showing the antiquity of the sexual consummation motif before the fall. The rabbinic position cannot be a reaction to a Christian position. Not only is the rabbinic idea of sexual relations before the fall found in *Jubilees*, but both establish their position on the very same verse. This can hardly be a coincidence. The rabbinic materials preserve an ancient piece of exegesis. But beyond this point, *Jubilees* and the Rabbis show serious disagreement. For the writer of *Jubilees*, Eden is the prototype of a Temple, a place of quintessential purity. Thus, the sexual relations of Adam and Eve take place before their entry into the Garden. Rabbinic thought is a bit more complex. On the one hand, Eden represents a concentrated locus of divine blessing—a blessing which actualizes itself in sexual fertility. On the other hand, the anticipated (marital) joy of the eschaton is foreshadowed in Eden. Just as marital bliss shall characterize the *Endzeit*, so marital bliss characterized the *Urzeit*.

⁴⁰The expected word order would be verb and then noun. This verse begins with the sequence noun, verb.

⁴¹J. Tigay, “Paradise,” *EncJud*, 13. 79.

⁴²See the comments of Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 5. 134–35 n. 5 in regard to *Midrash Aggada* to Gen 4:1. This text was unavailable to me.

ESCHATOLOGICAL PURITY AND SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY

Eschatological Purity as Purity for Battle

The concept of purity is also important for understanding the role of sexual experience in certain forms of Syriac Christianity.⁴³ As Murray has indicated, Syriac asceticism is not as far removed from Jewish experience as has often been thought.⁴⁴ For example, if one can assume that celibate individuals existed at Qumran, then one can posit a basic similarity between the asceticism of early Syriac Christianity and that of the covenanters of Qumran.⁴⁵ It is often stated that the celibate state was by no means uniform in the Qumran community. It seems to be an ideal espoused by the select few who resided at the actual Qumran site. The celibate state which was experienced there followed from the apocalyptic consciousness of the sect. Because these covenanters saw themselves as preparing for the final eschatological battle, a battle which would be fought by ritually pure warriors (*War Scroll*, 7.5–6), they assumed the state of ritual purity appropriate to such an event, namely, a sexually continent one. This holy war imagery is also picked up in early Syriac Christian tradition. As Murray has argued, one text found in Aphrahat probably represents an independent, early homily which was incorporated into his own work.⁴⁶

⁴³For asceticism in Syriac Christianity, see A. Adam, "Grundbegriffe des Mönchtums in sprachlicher Sicht," *ZKG* 65 (1953–54) 209–39; E. Beck, "Ein Beitrag zur Terminologie des ältesten syrischen Mönchtums," in *Antonius Magnus Eremita* (StAns 38; Rome, 1956); G. Kretschmar, "Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Ursprung frühchristlicher Askese," *ZThK* 61 (1964) 27–67; and Peter Nagel, *Die Motivierung der Askese in der alten Kirche und der Ursprung des Mönchtums* (TU 95; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966).

⁴⁴Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 1–38. Also see the discussions in A. Guillaumont, "Monachisme et éthique judéo-chrétienne," in *Judéo-Christianisme: Recherches historiques et théologiques offertes en hommage au Cardinal Jean Danielou* (Paris: Recherches de Science Religieuse, 1972) 199–218, and Steven D. Fraade, "Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism," in Arthur Green, ed., *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 283–84 n. 60.

⁴⁵One should note the important criticisms of Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Sectarian Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Courts, Testimony, and the Penal Code* (BJS 33; Chico: Scholars Press, 1983) 13, 19, 214–15. He has argued that the Qumran community was not celibate on the basis that the *Rule of the Congregation* and the *Zadokite Document* both assume marriage as a normal institution in the sect. One should note, though, that Schiffman also questions the assumption that the Qumran covenanters should be identified with the Essenes (*ibid.*, 1). This allows him to take less seriously the collaborative evidence of Josephus and Philo that the sect did have celibate members. For other treatments of the problem of celibacy at Qumran see A. Marx, "Les racines du célibat essénien," *RQ* 7 (1970) 323–42; A. Guillaumont, "À propos du célibat des Esséniens," in *Hommages à André Dupont-Sommer* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1971) 395–404; H. Hübner, "Zölibat in Qumran?" *NTS* 17 (1971) 153–67; and J. Coppens, "Le célibat essénien," in M. Delcor, ed., *Qumrân, sa piété, sa théologie et son milieu* (Paris: Duculot, Gembloux, 1978).

⁴⁶See the discussion of this text in Robert Murray, "The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syriac Church," *NTS* 21 (1974–75) 60–70. Murray and others

O you who are summoned to the contest (*ʿagôṇâ*),
 hear the sound of the trumpet and take heart.
 To you too I speak, you trumpet-bearers,
 priests and “scribes” and wise men;
 Call out and say to the whole people:
 Whoever is afraid, let him turn back from the contest,
 lest he break the spirit of his brethren with his own.
 And whoever has planted a vineyard, let him return to his husbandry,
 lest thinking of it he yield in battle.
 And whoever is engaged to a woman and wants to marry her,
 let him turn back and “rejoice” (*neḥdêʿ*) with his wife.
 And whoever is building a house, let him turn back to it,
 lest he remember his house and not fight whole-heartedly.
 It is for single ones (*ʿihîdāyê*) that the contest calls,
 because they have turned their faces to what lies ahead,
 and do not remember what lies behind.⁴⁷ (*Dem.* 7.18)

The important point to be made is that the exhortation to join the Christian “covenant” (*qyāmâ*) is understood in the imagery of preparing for holy war. The war-camp of the Pentateuch has become the model for daily living. Just as Israel consecrated themselves (*qds*) at Mt. Sinai in preparation for the revelation and march to battle (Exod 19:10–15), so must the Christian. Just as Israel’s wars required that the warrior be ritually pure, so does the final war. These Christian warriors must prepare themselves for this context (*ʿagôṇâ*) and become “consecrated” or holy (*qaddîšûtâ*)⁴⁸ as well as single-minded. The concept of “singleness” (*ʿihîdāyûtâ*) was a rich term in early Syriac Christianity. It had at least three distinct technical uses: (1) singleness from a spouse, (2)

have suggested that the context of this early homily was an ancient Christian baptismal rite. If this is correct, then it is possible that this homily represents a stage in the early Syriac church in which celibacy was required for baptism into the “covenant.” One should note, though, that this is very speculative and does not evolve out of a simple reading of the text. Some scholars of Syriac Christianity doubt whether celibacy ever was a criterion for baptism (so Sidney Griffith, oral communication). On the question of celibacy and baptism see Arthur Vööbus, *Celibacy, a Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church* (Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1951); R. H. Connolly, “Aphraates and Monasticism,” *JTS* 6 (1905) 529; J. Gribomont, “Le monachisme au sein de l’Église en Syrie et en Cappadoce,” *Studia Monastica* 7 (1965) 2–24; and Guillaumont, “Monachisme et éthique judéo-chrétienne.”

⁴⁷The translation is that of Robert Murray and was taken from his “Exhortation to Candidates,” 61. The text can be found in *Patrologia Syriaca* 1. 341:11–26.

⁴⁸The Syriac fathers have understood this term along the lines of its usage in Exod 9:10, 15, that is, as a term which entails sexual continence. The opposite connotation exists in Talmudic Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew. There the term refers to the state of marriage.

single in heart, and (3) united to the only-begotten.⁴⁹ These three distinct meanings demonstrate the close connection between the celibate state and Christian existence.

The central core of this text is a homiletical retelling of the rules for holy war found in Deut 20:5–7. This text, which is picked up in the Gospels as a metaphor for the preparation for the Messianic banquet at the end of time (Matt 22:1–14; Luke 14:16–24), provides several guidelines as to who was not allowed to participate in the war. One person who was restricted was the individual who had betrothed a woman (ʿāšer ʿēras ʾiššāh), but not yet taken her in marriage (lōʾ lēqāhāh).⁵⁰ This particular law is repeated in Deut 24:5. This text specifies what it is about the “taking in marriage” that necessitates exemption. The newly married man must “make his wife rejoice,” and so becomes unfit for holy war.⁵¹ This Syriac exhortation has read the idiom of “rejoicing” found in Deut 24:5 back into Deut 20:7. Targum Ps.-Jonathan does the very same thing as was noted above. This combination of images gives emphasis to the fact that it is sexual experience which is dangerous to the Christian, not simply the state of marriage. As Murray and others have argued, the overall tenor of this section in Aphrahat appears quite ancient; it seems to be a homily exhorting Christians to assume a sexually continent existence.⁵² If the context is specifically that of a baptismal oration,⁵³ then this meant that individuals who were already married would vow to abstain from sex upon baptism. Other individuals would simply put off baptism until old age.⁵⁴

Purity in the Garden

Like the book of *Jubilees*, Ephrem conceives of Eden as a mountain sanctuary.⁵⁵ This imagery is implicit in the description of Eden found in Genesis 2–3.

⁴⁹On these three technical uses see Murray, “Exhortation to Candidates,” 13 n. 3.

⁵⁰As Douglas has observed (*Purity and Danger*, 51–52), the law entails that one is not fit for holy war if one has commenced an important activity but not finished it. This position of being betwixt and between is the very essence of the ritual experience of liminality and the liminal state is almost always an impure one. In the present context, the state of being betwixt and between would be most incongruent with the call to become “single” (ʾihīdāyūtā) in Christ.

⁵¹So the MT, LXX, and T. Onkelos. The Vg, Peshitta? Ps.-Jonathan, and the Samaritan Targum read: “he shall rejoice with his wife.” The text from Aphrahat presumes the reading of the Peshitta, Palestinian Targumic tradition, and Jerome.

⁵²Though Aphrahat, and later Ephrem, would still see celibacy as the highest state of the Christian, they would not say that sexually active married individuals could not be baptized.

⁵³This point is subject to debate: see n. 46.

⁵⁴Murray, “Exhortation to Candidates,” 15.

⁵⁵From this point on, our discussion of Ephrem will center on his *Hymns on Paradise*. See the edition of Edmund Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso und Contrary Julianum* (CSCO 174; Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1957). A good study of the sanctuary motif is that of N. Séd, “Les hymnes sur le Paradis de Saint Ephrem et les traditions juives,” *Le Muséon* 81 (1968) 454–501. Two recent studies of Ephrem’s treatment of the material in Genesis are Sten Hidal, *Interpretatio*

The only explicit description of Eden as a mountain is to be found in Ezekiel. As Jon Levenson has shown, some of the imagery of the restoration of Jerusalem in Ezekiel employs Edenic imagery.⁵⁶ The image of the mountain is also central to the description of Eden in Ezekiel 28. This narrative is very similar to the Eden narrative in Genesis, though it is clearly a variant tradition. It describes an individual residing in the Garden of Eden who through his great wisdom and wealth arrogated to himself the very title of God (28:1–3). As a result of his great pride, God denied his divine status, and evicted him from the Garden (28:6–10). He was to become as those who are dead. In the lament over this individual which follows, Eden is described as the mountain of God (28:14) and as a spot of many precious stones. The mountain image was important for Ephrem as were the stones (*Hymns* 7.4). The stones recall in part the stones mentioned in Gen 2:11–12. A better parallel can be found in Exod 28:17–20. This text describes the stones which were on the priestly vestments. The agreement as to stone type and the order of presentation is too close to be accidental. The imagery of the Temple and Eden could be interchanged. What is not often noticed in Ezekiel 28 is that the specific result of human pride within the Garden is the profanation of the sanctuary (Ezek 28:18).⁵⁷ This detail did not go unnoticed in Ephrem's characterization of Adam's sin in the Garden.

It is the image of Eden as a Temple, a spot of purity, that informs Ephrem's description of Eden. Not only is Eden modeled on the Temple—a common topos in Jewish and Christian literature—but the very sin of Adam is understood as a violation of the laws of Temple-purity. The tree of knowledge of good and evil is understood as a veil which separates, the outer court from the holy of holies wherein resided the tree of life (*Hymns* 3.3, 5). The commandment given to Adam not to eat that fruit is understood as ritual legislation reflecting the still (relatively) impure state of Adam. As a warrior in battle, Adam was still awaiting the final victory when God gave him his instructions regarding the tree in Eden (*Hymns* 3.10, lines 4–6). If Adam had persevered in his initial state outside the holy of holies, he would have been granted access to the inner realm.

For God did not give permission
for Adam to enter
the inner realm of the Tabernacle,
for this was kept under guard,
that he might do well in his service

Syriaca (Lund: Gleerup, 1974), and Tryggve Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1978). The former work uses the commentaries while the latter work uses the hymns.

⁵⁶Jon D. Levenson, *The Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40–48* (HSM 10; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976) 25–36.

⁵⁷The word “sanctuary” is singular in the Syriac Peshitta, plural in the MT.

within the outer realm of the Tabernacle.
 And like the priest
 who offers up incense,
 if Adam had guarded the commandment,
 then the censer would have been his.
 He would have entered before the concealed spot
 before the concealed realm of the Tabernacle.
 The mystery of Paradise
 was depicted by Moses
 when he made two holies
 the holy and the holy of holies.
 To the outer realm
 he had allowed [continual] entry,
 but to the inner realm
 only once [a year].⁵⁸
 So also in regard to Paradise
 he sealed the inner realm,
 but opened the outer
 for Adam to be content therein.
 (*Hymns* 3.16 – 17)

Adam's initial status is like that of a priest whose access to the inner sanctum of the shrine is restricted. In the outer realm he can still perform cultic service, but he must await a special appointed time when he can enter the holy of holies. Adam's transgression was understood to be a wanton act of disregard for this restriction. Adam's sin was the desecration of the holy shrine of Eden.

Adam, in his state of pollution,
 had desired to enter
 the very holy of holies,
 which desires only those similar to it.
 But he who brashly enters
 the inner sanctum of the Tabernacle,
 even to the outer court,
 he cannot permit him [to enter again].
 [Just as] the sea of life
 when it sees a corpse within,
 it cannot permit it to remain
 but casts it out. (*Hymns* 4.2)

This text describes Adam's sin as a profanation of the sanctuary. The only

⁵⁸The model is that of the Day of Atonement wherein the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies once every year with his shovel of coals and incense. See Lev 16:1 – 3; Heb 9:1 – 7, and the description of the rites of the High Priest in *m. Yoma*.

Edenic tradition in the Bible which does so is found in Ezekiel 28. Yet Ephrem does not quote this text in Ezekiel; instead he turns to the example of Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26. Uzziah was a king who by nature of his great military exploits received an international reputation as well as acquired great wealth (26:8). As a result his heart grew proud (*gābāh libbô*) even to the point of destruction (*‘ad lē-hašhîr*), so that he ended up committing a sacrilege in the Temple (26:16). The sacrilege is that of assuming the office of priesthood and deigning to enter the inner sanctum of the sanctuary to burn incense. It is difficult to understand why Ephrem would have chosen this text in Chronicles to illustrate Adam’s sin. There is nothing in the text which recalls the imagery of Genesis 2–3. But, if we assume that Ephrem had the Ezekielian description of Eden in mind as well, the text in Chronicles is very appropriate. The description of Uzziah is strikingly similar to the more general description of the fall of the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28. In Ezekiel the king who resides in Eden also becomes proud to the point of destruction (*gābāh libbēkā / šihattā hokmātēkā*) and ends up profaning the sanctuary (28:17–18; cf. 2 Chron 28:16). Perhaps it is worth noting that rabbinic texts compare the forehead of Uzziah which was smitten with leprosy to the forehead of Adam, though the rabbinic texts do not develop the character of Uzziah as a parallel to Adam.⁵⁹ In any event, we would suggest that it is the similarities of the Uzziah story to the description of the fall from favor in Ezekiel 28 which made Uzziah a suitable model or type for the Genesis narrative. Without this Ezekielian intermediary, it would be difficult to understand the reason for Ephrem choosing such an analogy.

Uzziah is excluded from the sanctuary forever because he was an unclean leper. Ephrem makes the following comparison:

In the middle, God planted
the tree of knowledge
so as to divide what is above from what is below,
the holy from the holy of holies.
Adam brashly drew near,
he was “smitten” like Uzziah.
The king was a leper,
Adam was stripped.
He who was “stricken” like Uzziah,
hurriedly went forth.
The kings fled and hid,
for they were ashamed of their bodies. (*Hymns* 3.13)

The description of Adam being “smitten” and “stricken” like Uzziah involves a literary play on words. The normal idiom for being smitten with leprosy

⁵⁹See *b. Sotah* 10a and parallels.

involves the verb *mḥâ*, “to (physically) smite, inflict a blow.” The two verbs Ephrem uses (*ʿetgannah*, *blaʿ*) refer to the terror, grief, or sorrow of the heart. Both individuals were “smitten” for their sins, but the effects were different. Adam lost the glory in which he was clothed, while Uzziah was afflicted with leprosy. The description of Adam’s sins is in every way paralleled by Uzziah. Both desecrate a shrine through brazen action, both of their bodies are transformed and both are banished from their former homes. Adam is treated as though he were a leper (Leviticus 13–14), so only the rites of purification can lead to his return to Eden (*Hymns* 4.3).

Syriac tradition, as it is reflected in Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise*, shows some startling consistencies with the Jewish traditions of Paradise found in *Jubilees*. Like *Jubilees*, Ephrem’s entire picture of the Garden and interpretation of the transgression of Adam depends on a model of purity which is appropriate to the Temple. Unlike *Jubilees*, Ephrem takes a considerable interest in the actual transgression of Adam. The book of *Jubilees* shows little interest in this event and simply repeats the biblical story with few modifications. The transgression is hardly a “fall.” For Ephrem, Adam’s sin has considerable consequences, but even for him the concept of the fall is not adequate to the material. The Sethite generation continues to live at the very edge of paradise in a state of existence that is not much different from Eden itself. Adam’s sin results in his expulsion, but there seems to be no major ontological changes in his character. The true “fall” does not occur until the flood, when the Sethites mingle with the Cainites and as a result are driven from the entire area which surrounds Eden. To be sure, sex does occur for the first time after the transgression. But it is not simply the fact of this transgression which determines the beginning of sexual relations. Just as important is the movement from a sacred to a profane location. In this regard, Ephrem’s thinking is very similar to that of *Jubilees* or even the sect that resided at Qumran.

Marriage in the Garden in the Cave of Treasures

Before ending we should mention the treatment of the Garden in the Syriac document, the *Cave of Treasures*.⁶⁰ This text is a retelling of biblical history

⁶⁰This document is attributed to Ephrem, but does not derive from him. A critical Syriac and Arabic text were published by Carl Bezold in 1888. See the recent reprint, *Die Schatzhöhle* (Amsterdam: Philo, 1981). The work was translated into English by E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1927). According to A. Götze it probably dates to a time not long after Aphrahat (*Die Schatzhöhle: Überlieferung und Quellen* [Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1922]). This late fourth century (perhaps early fifth century) dating is accepted by Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 19. It is a very important work for it provides an example of what a popular homiletic reading of the Bible might have looked like. Moreover it is an important witness to the Christian roots of Islamic traditions about the biblical prophets. On this topic see W. M. Thackston, *Tales of the Prophets of al Kisaʿi* (Boston: Twayne, 1978) xiii–xiv, xxii–xxiv.

from the time of Adam up to and including the life of Christ. Its description of Eden is similar to Ephrem's in several ways. Eden is thought to be a cosmic mountain upon which Adam serves as priest. The sin of Adam, though, is not represented as an act of cultic impropriety, nor is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thought to represent the veil before the holy of holies. The section which relates the story of Eve's creation is patterned very closely on the biblical text.

And God cast sleep on Adam and he slept. He took one of his ribs from his left side and made Eve from it. When Adam awoke, he saw Eve and rejoiced greatly at her.⁶¹

As this essay has shown, the term "rejoice" in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Akkadian can refer to the act of sexual intercourse. One must reckon with the possibility that this Syriac text could also refer to this form of marital joy. What is more, this idiom of joy occurs in the exact location where early Jewish sources had located Adam and Eve's first sexual tryst. But could this Syriac text intend the same thing? There is a strong probability that this was the case, as can be seen in the rather expansive Arabic "translation" of this work.⁶²

When Adam awoke from his sleep he saw Eve and "rejoiced greatly"⁶³ at her and developed a liking for her. God made them dwell together in the beautiful Eden of paradise. He clothed them in his splendor and the two of them radiated that splendor which the two of them were adorned (*lbs?*) in.⁶⁴ God crowned them with marriage crowns and all the angels took delight in them. There was a wedding feast there (literally, a "joy," *farahun*), the likes of which has not existed either before or after and will not exist until

⁶¹Bezold, *Die Schatzhöhle*, 18–20.

⁶²The Arabic translation of the Syriac original is quite free and expansive. Indeed, it is often a type of midrash on the Syriac. This text has received almost no attention by scholars. A thorough treatment of the MSS can be found in Götze, *Die Schatzhöhle*, 23–38. He dates the work to around 750 CE.

⁶³In Arabic also, the term for rejoice, *faraha*, is not used freely. It is particularly associated with the joy of festive occasions like weddings. My colleague D. Crow has informed me that this term is used in colloquial Egyptian Arabic to this day in a blessing recited over a newly married couple. One often wishes that the couple experience a thousand joys. The sense of such a blessing is not a general desire for a happy marriage; rather it is the hope that the couple will experience a thousand sexual unions that result in children. The invoking of this blessing can often embarrass the newly married couple, especially in an age of birth control. The meaning of the term joy in this Arabic marriage blessing is very similar to the meaning of joy in the Jewish blessing discussed at the beginning of this article.

⁶⁴The grammar of this Arabic text is colloquial Christian Arabic and not classical Arabic. As a result some of the verbal forms are unusual. I have parsed this verb as a third form, perfect, in the dual. As a result I have ignored the final *hamza*.

the day on which the savior of the world comes. That is the day of resurrection.

The marriage celebration of Adam and Eve is the primary concern of this text. Nowhere else in mainstream Syriac tradition could one find a tradition of Adam and Eve being married in the Garden. Behind Adam's great rejoicing at the presentation of Eve is an ancient Jewish reading of *zō't happa'am*. Though this Jewish ideal of the sexual relationship of Adam and Eve did not accord with Christian ideas, other aspects of the Jewish midrashic elaboration of Eden did. For Syriac Christian writers, the theme of marriage in the Garden was important for the metaphors it provided. The church was understood as the bride of Christ and, since Eden was also a symbol for the church, Eden acquired marital images.⁶⁵

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has examined the treatment of marriage in the Garden in three different groups of material: the rabbinic corpus, the book of *Jubilees*, and early Syriac sources. We have shown, contrary to Ginzberg, that the motif of sexual consummation prior to the "fall" was an early, pre-Christian idea. More importantly, though, we have clarified how the material regarding Adam and Eve's sexuality should be approached. Ginzberg, like many other scholars, was influenced by the Christian category of the fall and believed that the presence of sex after the expulsion was simply another way of saying that sexual relations were the result of a "fall" from grace. The book of *Jubilees* provides firm proof that the category of the "fall" does not account for the presence or absence of sex in the Garden. Rather than focus on the concept of the fall, this article has argued that the concept of purity is a better means of understanding the role of sex in the Garden. *Jubilees*, which in no way advocates a position of celibacy, restricts sexual relations to the area outside of Eden because Eden is understood as a Temple. Ephrem, in his *Hymns on Paradise*, follows this reasoning. Rabbinic tradition, on the other hand, does not understand the concept of Eden in terms of priestly purity within the Temple. Its concerns are quite different. For the Rabbis, Eden is a spot of divine blessing and joy. For those familiar with the vigorous attention the Rabbis generally give to the standards of levitical purity and the gross disdain early Christians often showed toward these very same rules, it is more than mildly ironical that in this instance it is the Christians who follow the levitical model while the Rabbis ignore it.

⁶⁵As Murray observes (*Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 255), one can detect in Syriac Christianity the concept that "life in the Church is an anticipation of paradise" and so the state of virginity anticipates "the 'angelic' state in the heavenly wedding-feast and bridechamber."



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NOAH'S NAKEDNESS AND THE CURSE ON CANAAN (GENESIS 9:20–27)

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The compressed, elusive narrative of Gen 9:20–27 has been an exegetical puzzle since antiquity.¹ The terseness of the account, with its inexplicable features and subtle hints of sexual transgression, has left generations of readers and scholars feeling that there is more to the story than the narrator has made explicit. As many have pointed out, interpretive debates generally revolve around two interrelated questions: (1) the nature of Ham's offense (why would Ham's "seeing" Noah's nakedness merit a curse?), and (2) the rationale for Canaan's punishment (if Ham was the perpetrator, why was Canaan cursed?).²

The basic outlines of the story (Gen 9:20–27) are well known. After the flood, Noah plants a vineyard, drinks of its wine, becomes drunk, and uncovers himself in a tent (v. 21). Ham, identified as the father of Canaan, "sees the

¹ For a review of rabbinic and some patristic exegesis of the passage, see Albert I. Baumgarten, "Myth and Midrash: Genesis 9:20–29," in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty* (ed. Jacob Neusner et al.; 4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 3:55–71. Susan Niditch calls the text "intriguing and difficult" (*Chaos to Cosmos: Studies in Biblical Patterns of Creation* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985], 51), while Marc Vervenne characterizes it as "an eccentric anecdote of which the reception and interpretation are often equally fantastic" ("What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor? A Critical Re-Examination of Genesis 9.20–27," *JSOT* 68 [1995]: 55).

² See Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 66; Deborah Steinmetz, "Vineyard, Farm, and Garden: The Drunkenness of Noah in the Context of Primeval History," *JBL* 113 (1994): 198.

nakedness of his father” (וִירָא עֲרוּתָא אָבִיו) and tells his brothers outside (v. 22). Shem and Japheth take a garment and enter the tent backwards. With eyes averted, they cover their father (v. 23). When Noah awakens, he realizes what Ham had “done to him” (עָשָׂה לוֹ, v. 29). He then blesses Shem and Japheth, but curses Ham’s youngest son, Canaan (vv. 25–27).

Exegetes since antiquity have identified Ham’s deed as either voyeurism, castration, or paternal incest. This last explanation seems to be enjoying a revival of popularity in some recent scholarship. This article will argue for a fourth possible explanation of Ham’s deed: maternal incest, which simultaneously explains the gravity of Ham’s offense and the rationale for the cursing of Canaan, who is the fruit of the illicit union. The full case for this view has never been adequately presented, and it is particularly apropos to do so now, given the increasing interest in the theory of paternal incest.³

In what follows we will first review the traditional explanations for Ham’s offense, identifying their weaknesses. Then, building on the work of other narrative critics, we will demonstrate the exegetical basis and explanatory power of the theory of maternal incest.⁴ In particular, we will show that the arguments for the currently popular interpretation of Ham’s deed as paternal incest are more suited to support maternal incest.

I. The Traditional Views

Voyeurism

The view that Ham’s offense was *voyeurism*—that he did nothing more than behold his naked father—has enjoyed widespread support both in antiq-

³ F. W. Bassett first proposed the maternal-incest interpretation in a brief (five-page) article, without, unfortunately, marshaling all the arguments in favor of it (“Noah’s Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan: A Case of Incest?” *VT* 21 [1971]: 232–37). Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn endorse the theory in passing, adding some new ideas (*Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1–11* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1985], 101–3). For proponents of the theory of paternal incest, see nn. 12–13 below.

⁴ A brief word on methodology. We find ourselves most closely aligned with the narrative analysis of Robert Alter, who discerned that literary intentionality often lies behind apparent inconcinnities in the narrative of Genesis (*The Art of Biblical Narrative* [New York: Basic Books, 1981]). We are also instructed by Michael Fishbane’s demonstration of the exegetical value of attentiveness to the complex and, at times, reciprocal interrelationships among biblical texts (*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1984]). Guided by the work of these scholars and other exegetes, we make a heuristic “inference to the best explanation.” We wish to show that the theory of maternal incest best explains the otherwise anomalous features of both the text and its relationship to its context.

uity and in modernity.⁵ The strength of this position is its conservatism: it refuses to see anything in the text that is not explicit. Yet, in a sense, voyeurism is a nonexplanation, since it fails to elucidate either the gravity of Ham's offense or the reason for the curse of Canaan. It also requires the interpreter to assume the existence of a taboo against the accidental sight of a naked parent that is otherwise unattested in biblical or ancient Near Eastern literature. Donald J. Wold remarks, "Scholars who accept the literal view . . . must defend a custom about which we know nothing."⁶

Some proponents of this view are content to accept the awkward features of the narrative of Gen 9:20–27 as inexplicable and/or arbitrary.⁷ However, those exegetes who, through the work of Robert Alter, Michael Fishbane, and others, have come to appreciate the literary artistry and subtlety of the biblical authors and the significance of biblical intertextuality are unlikely to find this position satisfactory.⁸ There is increasing recognition that the pentateuchal narrative is seldom careless or arbitrary, and intertextual echoes (to be examined below) are seldom coincidental.⁹

Castration

The traditional rabbinic view that Ham castrated Noah arose as an attempt to address the inadequacies of the voyeuristic interpretation.¹⁰ A classic discussion of the view is found in *b. Sanh. 70a*:

⁵ E.g., H. Hirsch Cohen, *The Drunkenness of Noah* (Judaic Studies 4; University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 14–16; Allen P. Ross "The Curse of Canaan," *BSac* 130 (1980): 223–40; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 322–23; Gordon P. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 198–201; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 87; Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (trans. I. Abrahams; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), 2:149–54; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 1; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 61; Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 418–20; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion, S.J.; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 484–88.

⁶ Wold, *Out of Order*, 67.

⁷ E.g., Speiser, *Genesis*, 62.

⁸ See n. 4 above.

⁹ For example, concerning the pericope under discussion, Vervenne concludes: "the tale of the drunken Noah . . . has been meticulously embedded in a genealogical framework. . . . This precisely embedded composition . . . is also a self-contained piece of art" ("What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor?" 43–44).

¹⁰ For an extensive review of the rabbinic exegesis of this passage, see Baumgarten, who concludes that the rabbis developed the theory of castration as an explanation for features of the text ("Myth and Midrash," 55–71); thus, they are not transmitting an ancient tradition (contra Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966], 121–22). The relevant rabbinic texts are *b. Sanh. 70a*; *Gen. Rab. 36, 7*; *Tanh. 49–50*; *Pirqe R.*

And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. [With respect to the last verse] Rab and Samuel [differ,] one maintaining that he castrated him, whilst the other says that he sexually abused him. He who maintains that he castrated him, [reasons thus:] Since he cursed him by his fourth son, he must have injured him with respect to a fourth son. But he who says that he sexually abused him, draws an analogy between “and he saw” written twice. Here it is written, And Ham the father of Canaan saw the nakedness of his father; whilst elsewhere it is written, And when Shechem the son of Hamor saw her [he took her and lay with her and defiled her]. Now, on the view that he emasculated him, it is right that he cursed him by his fourth son; but on the view that he abused him, why did he curse his fourth son; he should have cursed him himself?—Both indignities were perpetrated. (Soncino translation)

Here we see the sages grappling with the two issues of the text identified above: the gravity of Ham’s sin and the cursing of Canaan. Rab concludes that Ham must have castrated Noah. In favor of Rab’s view, one can cite examples from ancient Near Eastern mythology (although none from the Bible) of a son castrating his father as part of an effort to usurp his authority.¹¹ Thus, Rab’s view suggests a possible motivation for Ham’s crime. It also provides some rationale, albeit complex, for the cursing of Canaan: Noah curses Ham’s fourth son since Ham deprived Noah of a fourth son. What is lacking, however, is any lexical hint in the text of Gen 9:20–27 that would suggest castration.

Paternal Incest

Samuel’s alternative view—that Ham sexually abused Noah—is enjoying a surprising contemporary resurgence, gaining the support of a number of scholars who represent divergent theological and methodological approaches but are united by conviction that the literary artist of Genesis conveys something more in Gen 9:20–27 than a simple “voyeurist” reading of the passage reveals. One of the more thorough defenses of this position is by Robert Gagnon in his recently published *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, but other proponents include Anthony Phillips, Devorah Steinmetz, Martti Nissinen, Donald J. Wold, Seth Daniel Kunin, and O. Palmer Robertson.¹² In addition, Robert

El. ch. 23; Tg. Ps.-J. on Gen 9:24–25. The earliest reference to this theory is found in Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum* 3, 19.

¹¹ See Graves and Patai, *Hebrew Myths*, 122.

¹² Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 63–71; Anthony Phillips, “Uncovering the Father’s Skirt,” in his *Essays on Biblical Law* (JSOTSup 344; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 245–50; Steinmetz, “Vineyard,” 193–207; Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 53; Wold, *Out of Order*, 65–76; Seth Daniel Kunin, *The Logic of Incest: A Structuralist Analysis of Hebrew Mythology* (JSOTSup 185; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995),

W. E. Forrest, Ellen van Wolde, and Susan Niditch are sympathetic, if not committed, to the view.¹³

As Hermann Gunkel, Gagnon, and many others have pointed out, the way the text describes Noah as realizing “what his youngest son *had done* (עשה לו) to him” suggests some action more substantial than passive viewing.¹⁴ It suggests an act or deed of which Noah was the recipient or victim. Indeed, it so happens that the phrase used to describe Ham’s transgression—“to see the nakedness of the father” (ראה ערות אב)—is an idiom for sexual intercourse.¹⁵ Leviticus 20:17 equates the idioms “to see nakedness” (ראה ערוה) and “to uncover nakedness” (גלה ערוה):

וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִקַּח אֶת אֹחֲתוֹ . . . וְרָאָה אֶת־עֲרוֹתֶיהָ וְהָיָה תְּרָאָה אֶת־עֲרוֹתוֹ חֹסֵד הוּא
 . . . עֲרוֹת אֹחֲתוֹ גִּלָּה

If a man takes his sister . . . and *sees her nakedness*, and she *sees his nakedness*, it is a disgrace, . . . *he has uncovered his sister's nakedness*.¹⁶

The phrase “to uncover nakedness” (גלה ערוה), in turn, is the usual expression for sexual intercourse in the Holiness Code:

אִישׁ אִישׁ אֶל־כָּל־שָׂאֵר בָּשָׂרוֹ לֹא תִקְרַב לְגִלּוֹת עֲרוֹת . . .

None of you shall approach anyone near of kin to uncover nakedness. (Lev 18:6)

The same idiom (גלה ערוה) occurs in descriptions of sexual promiscuity and sexual violence in Ezek 16:36–37; 22:10; 23:10, 18, 29. Thus, from an intertextual perspective, the description of Ham’s act as “seeing his father’s nakedness” implies more than a literal “seeing.”¹⁷

173–74; O. Palmer Robertson, “Current Critical Questions Concerning the ‘Curse of Ham’ (Gen. 9:20–27),” *JETS* 41 (1998): 179.

¹³ Robert W. E. Forrest, “Paradise Lost Again: Violence and Obedience in the Flood Narrative,” *JSTOT* 62 (1994): 15–16; Ellen van Wolde, *Stories of the Beginning: Genesis 1–11 and Other Creation Stories* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1997), 146; Niditch, *Chaos*, 52–53. If we have read these authors correctly, they appear to lean toward the paternal-incest view.

¹⁴ Hermann Gunkel remarks, “This cannot be all, because v. 24 presumes that Canaan [*sic*] had done something to him” (quoted in Westermann, *Genesis*, 488). Gagnon notes that “‘what his youngest son had done to him’ [is] not the expression one would expect to describe an unintended glance or even voyeurism” (*Homosexual Practice*, 65). See also Wold, *Out of Order*, 73; and Robertson, “Curse of Ham,” 179.

¹⁵ See Kunin, *Logic*, 174; Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 66; Hans-Jürgen Zobel, “*gālā*,” *TDOT* 2:479; Steinmetz, “Vineyard,” 198: “clearly the ‘seeing of nakedness’ implies a sexual violation, as it does throughout the biblical text”; Robertson, “Curse of Ham,” 179; and Vervenne, “What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor?” 49: “the key-word here, ערוה . . . does have an erotic and sexual connotation.”

¹⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all English biblical quotations are from the NRSV.

¹⁷ See Steinmetz, “Vineyard,” 199.

Besides the use of the phrase “to see nakedness” (רָאָה עֶרְוָה), there are other erotically charged lexemes in Gen 9:20–27 that suggest a situation of sexual transgression. Wine (יַיִן), for example, is intimately connected with sexuality in both biblical and ancient Near Eastern literature.¹⁸ Significantly, the only other reference to drunkenness in Genesis also occurs in the context of parent–child incest: Gen 19:30–38, the account of Lot’s intercourse with his daughters as the origin of Moab and Ammon. The Song of Songs is replete with images of wine as a symbol of sexuality and—strikingly—the vineyard (כֶּרֶם) as a place of lovemaking.¹⁹ The drinking of wine functions as a prelude to intercourse in Song of Songs (8:2) and in the dealings of David with Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam 11). Uriah refuses to go home, where he would “drink and lie with [his] wife” (2 Sam 11:11), so David gets him drunk in the hopes that he will dispense with his scruples and return to enjoy his spouse (2 Sam 11:13). Other biblical examples of the association of wine with sex could be cited, and the extensive ancient Near Eastern evidence (e.g., the cult of Dionysus/Bacchus and its analogues) has been explored elsewhere.²⁰

In addition to the vineyard (כֶּרֶם) and wine (יַיִן), there is the word used for Noah’s disrobing or “uncovering himself,” יִהְיֶה, from the root גִּלָּה. This root is used extensively in Leviticus 18 and 20 and various passages of Ezekiel, often in combination with עֶרְוָה, to designate illicit (usually incestuous) sexual intercourse, and also in the two verses of Deuteronomy that condemn parent–child incest (Deut 23:1 and 27:20).²¹ Usually Noah’s disrobing is thought to be merely the result of his drunkenness, yet individuals typically do not disrobe simply because they are drunk. Noah’s “uncovering himself” in the tent certainly carries erotic overtones.²² Steinmetz comments, “Just as ‘seeing’ nakedness is more than seeing, ‘uncovering’ is more than uncovering.”²³

When Gen 9:20–27 is understood as a case of parent–child incest, literary links with other pericopes in Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch suddenly become apparent. For example, several narrative critics have suggested that Gen 9:20–27 is chiastically linked to Gen 6:1–4, the story of the intercourse of the “sons of God” with the “daughters of men.”²⁴ One story introduces the

¹⁸ For an exploration of the association of wine and sexuality in ancient Greek, Egyptian, and Hebrew literature, see Cohen, *Drunkenness*, 3–6.

¹⁹ See Song 1:2, 4, 6; 2:13, 15; 5:1; 6:11; 7:2, 9, 12; 8:2, 11–12.

²⁰ See literature cited by Cohen, *Drunkenness*, 3–6.

²¹ See Steinmetz, “Vineyard,” 199: “To ‘uncover’ nakedness is the other term which the Bible uses to describe sexual immorality”; and Zobel, *TDOT* 2:479.

²² Cohen, *Drunkenness*, 17.

²³ Steinmetz, “Vineyard,” 199.

²⁴ See Kikawada and Quinn, *Before Abraham Was*, 101–3; Wold, *Out of Order*, 70; and the comments of Forrest: “Ham’s actions may justly be associated with the activities of the ‘sons of God’ in 6.1–4 who similarly broke ranks . . . Ham’s ‘offense’, with its implications of incest, echoes

flood narrative, and the other concludes it; Gen 5:32 continues in Gen 9:28–29, forming an *inclusio* around the two stories.²⁵ When Gen 9:22 is understood as paternal incest, it becomes clear that the two stories are united by the theme of illicit sexual intercourse as well.

Likewise, Niditch, Steinmetz, Kunin, and many others see thematic links between Gen 9:20–27 and Gen 19:30–38, the story of Lot's daughters and the procreation of Moab and Ammon.²⁶ The similarities between the two pericopes are numerous: in the aftermath of a calamitous divine judgment, instigated by the wickedness of men—particularly sexual wickedness (cf. Gen 6:4; 19:5), which destroys the earth or a large part of it—an aged patriarch gets drunk, facilitating intercourse between parent and child, giving rise to one or more of the traditional enemies of Israel (Canaan, Moab, and Ammon).²⁷ The parallels hardly seem coincidental. Steinmetz points out that “the parallel between the Lot story and the vineyard story supports the implication of a sexual violation of Noah by his son.”²⁸

More than one scholar has noted a relationship between Gen 9:20–27 and Leviticus 18 and 20.²⁹ Leviticus 18 and 20 are integrally linked in that ch. 20 specifies the penalties for sins described in ch. 18. Both chapters are linked to Gen 9:20–27 by the words and phrases “to uncover” (גלה), “nakedness of the father” (ערוה אב), and “to see nakedness” (ראה ערוה). Moreover, Leviticus 18 opens with a warning not to imitate the practices of the inhabitants of Canaan or Egypt, the two most prominent descendants of Ham (v. 3, cf. Gen 10:6).³⁰ Several commentators have seen the introduction to Leviticus 18 (vv. 1–5) as referring to Ham's violation of Noah, arguing either chs. 18 and 20 are a legal reflection on Gen 9:20–27 or that Gen 9:20–27 is an etiological narrative based

the account of the illicit activities of the sons of God and the daughters of men (*dm*) which precipitated the flood. . . . Thus the Ham incident provides a fitting conclusion to the [Flood Narrative] with its resounding echoes of both ch. 3 and the opening pericope of 6.1–4” (“Paradise Lost,” 15–16).

²⁵ See Vervenne, “What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor?” 43: “Gen. 9:28–29 virtually concludes 5.32.”

²⁶ Calum M. Carmichael notes, “The two earliest incidents of incestuous conduct in the book of Genesis involve drunkenness, first Noah's and then Lot's. The two incidents have much in common: the role of wine, the initiative toward the parent from the son or daughter . . . the concern for future generations” (*Law, Legend, and Incest in the Bible: Leviticus 18–20* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997], 15). See also Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 70; and Steinmetz, “Vineyard,” 199 n. 13.

²⁷ For a thorough examination of the similarities of the passages, see Niditch, *Chaos*, 53–55.

²⁸ Steinmetz, “Vineyard,” 199.

²⁹ E.g., Wold, *Out of Order*, 66; Phillips, *Essays on Biblical Law*, 247–48; Steinmetz, “Vineyard,” 198–99.

³⁰ See Steinmetz, “Vineyard,” 198–99, esp. n. 12; Pss 105:23, 27; 106:22; 78:51.

on Lev 18:1–8.³¹ Seen in this light, it then becomes significant that the very first sexual transgression Leviticus 18 lists in association with the Hamitic nations Canaan and Egypt is parental incest, literally, “uncovering your father’s nakedness” (לא תגלה . . . ערות אביו, vv. 7–8), essentially the crime Ham committed (וירא חם . . . את ערות אביו). This would make good sense if the author/redactor of Leviticus 18 interpreted Ham’s deed in Gen 9:20–27 as a sexual violation of Noah, setting a precedent of incestuous sexual relations for his descendants.

A similar situation exists with respect to Deut 23:1:

לֹא־יִקַּח אִישׁ אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ אָבִיו וְלֹא יְגַלֶּה כִּנּוֹף אָבִיו

A man shall not take his father’s wife, and shall not uncover his father’s skirt.
[ASV]

Phillips argues:

Deuteronomy 23:1b is a deliberate enactment of the Deuteronomist and is part of his anti-Canaanite material. It was added at the head of the list of prohibited sexual relations in Lev 18.7–23 which the Canaanites, the former inhabitants of the land, were held to have committed (Lev 18.24–30) because no relationship was more abhorrent to the Israelites than that associated with Ham, the father of Canaan.³²

Phillips regards Ham’s sin in Gen 9:20–27 as paternal incest and argues that Deut 23:1b should be understood literally, as referring to sexual relations with one’s father.³³

In addition to clarifying the links between Gen 9:20–27 and other related pentateuchal texts, proponents of the paternal-incest theory point out that their view offers a possible motivation for Ham’s deed. By humiliating his father, Ham hoped to usurp his father’s authority and displace his older brothers in the

³¹ For example, Vervenne feels that both texts are Priestly and that the author teaches by illustration in 9:20–27 what is conveyed by law in Leviticus 18 and 20: “In Gen. 9:20–27, the rules and regulations to which Israel adheres . . . are projected onto the screen of primeval times” (“What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor?” 52–53). Ross remarks, “The constant references to ‘nakedness’ and ‘uncovering’ and even ‘seeing’ in this passage [Lev 18:2–6] . . . clearly remind the reader of the action of Ham, the father of Canaan. No Israelite . . . could read the story . . . without making the connection” (“Curse of Canaan,” 233–34). Gordon Wenham comments, “Lev 18:3 links both Egypt and Canaan as peoples whose habits are abominable. . . . Ham’s indiscretion towards his father may easily be seen as a type of the later behavior of the Egyptians and Canaanites” (*Genesis 1–15*, 201). See also Carmichael, *Law*, 14–44, and Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, 149–50.

³² Phillips, “Uncovering the Father’s Skirt,” 250.

³³ *Ibid.*, 245–50. Phillips’s main argument is that if “uncovering the skirt” means the same as “take to wife,” then Deut 23:1a and 23:1b are tautologous. However, “uncovering the skirt” is not exactly the same as “taking to wife”; the former refers to sexual relations, the latter to marriage.

familial hierarchy.³⁴ Nissinen notes that the story “does not speak of Ham’s homosexual orientation but his hunger for power.”³⁵ This explains why Ham promptly informed his brothers of what he had done (Gen 9:22b).

An obvious objection to the paternal-incest view is that the brothers’ action in v. 23 indicates that Noah’s nakedness was literal; thus Ham’s “seeing” in v. 22 should be taken literally (as voyeurism) rather than idiomatically (as intercourse). But the objection is not conclusive. Gagnon comments on the significance of v. 23:

The brothers’ actions in “covering their father’s nakedness” and taking great pains not to look at their father is compatible with an interpretation of “seeing another’s nakedness” as sexual intercourse. *The brothers’ actions play on the broader meaning of the phrase.* Not only did the brothers not “see their father’s nakedness” in the sense of having intercourse with him, but also they did not even dare to “see their father’s nakedness” in a literal sense. Where Ham’s act was exceedingly evil, their gesture was exceedingly pious and noble.³⁶

Likewise, Steinmetz, while acknowledging that v. 23 “support[s] the idea that sexual violation has broader implications than whatever physical act may be involved,” nonetheless does not feel that Shem and Japheth’s action “negates the implication of sexual immorality in this story.”³⁷

To summarize, the interpretation of Ham’s deed as paternal incest is supported by the idiomatic meaning of the phrase “to see the nakedness of the father” (ראה ערות אב) and erotic undertones of the text. It has the heuristic value of clarifying and illuminating intertextual relationships between Gen 9:20–27 and Gen 6:1–4; 19:30–38; Lev 18; 20; and Deut 23:1. It also provides a possible explanation for Ham’s motivation. However, it does not address the rationale for the cursing of Canaan.³⁸

The arguments scholars have marshaled in favor of the paternal-incest theory are substantive. The erotic imagery of the text, the idiomatic meaning of “to see nakedness,” the parallels with other pentateuchal texts, and the nature

³⁴ E.g., Nissinen (*Homoeroticism*, 53), and Gagnon, who claims, “By raping his father and alerting his brothers to the act, Ham hoped to usurp the authority of his father and elder brothers, establishing his right to succeed his father as patriarch” (*Homosexual Practice*, 66–67).

³⁵ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 53.

³⁶ Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 67 (emphasis ours). Wold (*Out of Order*, 74) and Robertson (“Curse of Ham,” 180) argue similarly.

³⁷ Steinmetz, “Vineyard,” 200 n. 15.

³⁸ Paternal-incest interpreters like Wold (*Out of Order*, 75–76) and Gagnon (*Homosexual Practice*, 67) claim that their theory elucidates why Canaan rather than Ham is cursed, but in fact they must resort to diachronic (historical-critical) explanations not necessarily tied to the paternal-incest hypothesis. In other words, they tacitly concede that paternal incest does not make sense of the cursing of Canaan *within the logic of the narrative itself*.

of Ham's deed as a familial-political power play all seem to support the supposition that Ham committed an incestuous act. To maintain in the face of this evidence that Ham merely looked at Noah is to turn a deaf ear to the literary nuances of the narrative. In what follows, however, it will be demonstrated that in almost every instance, these arguments for paternal incest are better suited to argue for maternal incest.

II. The Maternal-Incest View

We begin with the idiomatic meaning of the phrase *ראה ערות אב*, "to see the father's nakedness" (v. 22). Proponents of the theory of paternal incest are correct to equate *ראה ערוה* with *גלה ערוה*, "to uncover nakedness" via Lev 20:17, understanding both as euphemisms for sexual intercourse. However, one may take this valid insight one step further by recognizing that in all the relevant texts, *גלה/ראה ערוה* is associated with heterosexual activity, and "the nakedness of the father" (*ערוה אב*) actually refers to the mother's nakedness.³⁹ For example, in Lev 18:7–8, the "nakedness of your father" is defined as "the nakedness of your mother":

7 ערות אביך וערות אמה לא תגלה הוא לא תגלה ערותה 8 ערות אשת אביך לא תגלה ערות אביך הוא

⁷You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness.

⁸You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is the nakedness of your father.

Likewise, Lev 18:14, 16; 20:11, 30, 21 all describe a woman's nakedness as the nakedness of her husband. The same logic is at work in Deut 23:1 and 27:20, which describe intercourse with one's father's wife as "uncovering the father's skirt" (*גלה כנף אביו*).

On the contrary, the two verses in the Pentateuch that condemn homosexual relations (Lev 18:22 and 20:13) use the verb *שכב*, not *ראה ערוה* or *גלה ערוה* as in Gen 9:21–23. No combination of the terms *ערוה*, *ראה*, and/or *גלה* is found associated with homosexual relations anywhere in the Bible.

Therefore, the phrase *ראה ערות אב* in Gen 9:22 is a euphemism for sexual

³⁹ See Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 69 n. 72: "The prohibition against intercourse with 'your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother' refers to intercourse with one's mother, not one's father." Besides its use in Leviticus 18 and 20, the phrase occurs only in Ezek 22:10, where Ezekiel is quoting a list of sins from the Holiness Code (see *ibid.*, 66 n. 67). Thus, outside of Genesis 9, the phrase "nakedness of the father" (*ערוה אב*) in the Bible always refers to the nakedness of the father's wife.

intercourse indeed, but heterosexual rather than homosexual intercourse. If we take full account of the nuance of the biblical idiom, the statement that Ham "saw his father's nakedness" implies relations with Noah's wife, presumably Ham's mother. This is supported by the fact that the imagery of the vineyard (כרם) and wine (יין) is associated only with heterosexual intercourse in the Bible, whether in the story of Lot and his daughters (Gen 19:30–38), the David-Uriah-Bathsheba affair (2 Sam 11), or the Song of Songs (Songs 1:2, 4; 2:4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:9; 8:2). For example, the Song writer sings of male–female relations when he (or she) exclaims, "your kisses [are] like the best wine" (7:9) and "let us go out early to the vineyards. . . . There I will give you my love" (7:13).

It is salutary to recall that in Gen 9:1–17, the pericope immediately preceding the narrative under discussion, Noah and his sons are twice given the command to "be fruitful and multiply" (9:1, 7).⁴⁰ Genesis 9:19 ("from these the whole earth was peopled") suggests that the sons fulfilled this command, and 9:18, 22 stress Ham's role as progenitor of Canaan. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to interpret Noah's and Ham's actions in 9:20–22 in the context of procreative activity, however imperfect or distorted. Noah drank and disrobed in an effort to procreate; Ham intervened and succeeded.

Specifically, if Ham's deed is understood as maternal incest, it becomes possible to explain Canaan's origin as the fruit of that union. This insight suddenly illuminates two aspects of the text left unanswered by paternal-incest theorists: why Canaan is cursed, and why Ham is repeatedly identified as "the father of Canaan." Canaan is cursed because his origin was a vile, taboo act on the part of his father. Ham is repeatedly, and apparently superfluously, identified as "the father of Canaan" (vv. 18 and 20) because the narrator wishes to signal the reader that this narrative explains *how Ham became* "the father of Canaan." Van Wolde remarks:

The text opens . . . 'Ham was *the father of Canaan*' (9.18). It is striking that Ham is named *father* at the precise moment when he is introduced as a son. Later, at the transgression of Ham, exactly the same thing happens: "Ham, *the father of Canaan*, saw the nakedness of his father' (9.22). It sounds rather stupid. . . . Evidently the text wants to put all the emphasis on the fatherhood of Ham or, rather, on the fact that he is the father of Canaan.⁴¹

The repetition is not stupid, however, if the pericope is explaining how Ham fathered Canaan.

Once Ham's offense is understood as heterosexual and procreative (of Canaan), the links that paternal-incest theorists recognize between Gen 9:20–27 and Gen 6:1–4; 19:30–38; Lev 18 and 20; Deut 23:1; and 27:20 are

⁴⁰ See Kikawada and Quinn, *Before Abraham Was*, 102.

⁴¹ Van Wolde, *Stories*, 146.

clarified and strengthened. All these other passages concern heterosexual intercourse.

As mentioned above, scholars correctly (in our opinion) note an anti-Hamitic, anti-Canaanite polemic in the Holiness and Deuteronomic laws forbidding incest (Lev 18; Deut 23:1; 27:20), but the categories of incest listed are all heterosexual.⁴² Significantly, the first category of incest that Leviticus 18 associates with the Hamitic nations Canaan and Egypt is with the father's *wife* (Lev 18:6, 7), which is also the subject of Deut 23:1 and 27:20.⁴³ A strong etiological link between these laws and Gen 9:20–27 may be present if Ham's sin was maternal incest.

Furthermore, it is somewhat awkward to explain, on the theory of paternal incest, why the apparently related passages Gen 6:1–4 and Gen 19:30–38 concern the production of wicked offspring through illicit sexual union, but Gen 9:20–27 produces no offspring. Kunin concludes that “Canaan is symbolically the barren fruit of this relationship” between Ham and his father,⁴⁴ while Niditch, recognizing that Gen 9:20–27 does not fit the pattern of procreative sexuality, is puzzled at how “a homosexually incestuous symbolic action in some way further[s] the creation and ordering process” that she sees operative in these narratives.⁴⁵ The awkwardness is removed under the theory of maternal incest. All three pericopes (Gen 6:1–4; 9:20–27; and 19:30–38) concern the production of wicked offspring through illicit sexual union.⁴⁶ In particular, Gen 9:20–27 and 19:30–38 are both concerned with the repopulation of the earth (cf. 9:1, 7, 19; 19:31–32) after a (super)natural disaster and offer etiologies explaining the low state of Israel's traditional enemies (Canaan, Moab, Ammon) due to their origins in parent–child incest. As noted above, Steinmetz argues that the parallels between Gen 9:20–27 and 19:30–38 support “the implication of a sexual violation of Noah by his son.”⁴⁷ It could be argued further that the relationship between Gen 9:20–27 and Gen 19:30–38—as well as Gen 6:1–4; Lev 18:1–8; Deut 23:1; and 27:20—all support the implication of sexual violation of Noah's *wife* by her son.

⁴² Ironically, Gagnon himself recognizes this: “None of the prohibitions of specific forms of incest in Lev 18:6–18; 20:11–21 mentions acts of incest between two males” (*Homosexual Practice*, 69).

⁴³ Phillips's argument that Deut 23:1b should be read literally, as prohibiting intercourse with the father himself, has garnered little support. See n. 33 above.

⁴⁴ Kunin, *Logic of Incest*, 175.

⁴⁵ Niditch, *Chaos*, 54.

⁴⁶ Forrest notes that if it is “Noah's wife with whom Ham has an incestuous relationship . . . the balance with the ‘sons of God’ episode is even more marked. Just as they violate order with their inappropriate relationships with the daughters of men, so Ham similarly violates the natural order through intercourse with his mother” (*Paradise Lost*, 16 n. 30).

⁴⁷ Steinmetz, “Vineyard,” 199 n. 13.

⁴⁸ The actual historical question of the relationship between Israel and the Canaanites has, of

There is a rationale behind the ascription of the origins of Canaan and Moab/Ammon to different forms of incest (son–mother vs. father–daughter). The origins of the Canaanites, toward whom Israelite traditions often direct the most deep-seated antagonism,⁴⁸ are ascribed to a more serious form of incest; while Moab and Ammon, with whom the antagonism was slightly less, are granted an origin in less serious transgression. Intercourse between father and daughter, while certainly transgressive, was less serious in ancient Near Eastern and Israelite society than intercourse between son and (step-)mother. Although both were forbidden (Lev 18:7–8, 17),⁴⁹ intercourse between son and (step-)mother openly threatened the patriarchal authority structure of the family or clan. Basset remarks, “A son who has sexual relations with his mother or step-mother commits a rebellious sin against his father, since the possession of a man’s wife is seen also as an effort to supplant the man himself.”⁵⁰

Thus, Nissinen and Gagnon may be correct in viewing Ham’s transgressive sexual act as an attempt to usurp Noah’s patriarchal authority. However, they identify Ham’s act as the violation of Noah himself, and there is no precedent in biblical or ancient Near Eastern documents for paternal rape as a means of usurping a father’s position.⁵¹ Why would intercourse with the father serve to acquire his authority? But there is abundant attestation of sleeping with one’s father’s *wives* as a means of usurpation.⁵² Absalom’s infamous public intercourse with his father’s concubines (2 Sam 15:20–23), Reuben’s relations with Bilhah (Gen 35:22; 49:3–4), David’s acquisition of Saul’s concubines (2 Sam 12:8), and Adonijah’s attempt to acquire David’s wife Abishag (2 Kgs 2:13–25) are all notable examples of a son attempting to unseat his father through relations with the paternal consort(s). Ezekiel rebukes his contemporaries for committing this sin (Ezek 22:10).

course, been complicated by proposed historical reconstructions that envision Israel arising from Canaanite populations (e.g., Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 BCE* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979]). However, in the present form of the Pentateuch, anti-Canaanite polemic appears dominant (Gen 24:1; 34:30–31; Exod 23:23; 33:2; Deut 7:1–5; 20:17–18; etc.) and that attitude is reflected, we propose, in the texts under discussion.

⁴⁹ Leviticus 18:7–8 prohibits maternal or step-maternal incest; 18:17 forbids intercourse with any daughter of a woman with whom one has had sexual relations. Since a man’s daughter would always also be the daughter of a woman with whom he has had relations, Lev 18:17 would seem necessarily to prohibit all forms of father–daughter incest.

⁵⁰ Bassett, “Noah’s Nakedness,” 236.

⁵¹ Gagnon cites the Egyptian myth of Horus and Seth (in which Seth violates Horus) and a certain Mesopotamian omen text as evidence, but both explicitly concern intercourse between peers or brothers, not between father and son (*Homosexual Practice*, 47, 52, 66–67).

⁵² See Jon D. Levenson and Baruch Halpern, “The Political Import of David’s Marriages,” *JBL* 99 (1980): 507–18, here 508: “That through the carnal knowledge of a suzerain’s harem a man could lay claim to suzerainty himself was a custom apparently well-founded in Israel (2 Sam 3:6–10; 16:20–23; 1 Kgs 2:13–25).”

As for ancient Near Eastern literature, there is the myth of Baal-Hadad, who castrates El and takes El's wife Asherah as his own in an effort to acquire his father's royal authority,⁵³ and a similar Sumerian creation account in which the wind god Enlil—the son of the sky god An and the earth goddess Ki—separates his parents from each other and absconds with his mother, eventually replacing An as chief of the Sumerian pantheon.⁵⁴ An obvious Greek parallel for the usurpation of the father's position through (among other things) the possession of the mother is the myth of Oedipus.

Placing Ham's maternal incest into the larger framework of the ancient Near Eastern concept of supplanting a man (or more exactly, a father) by sleeping with his wives validates Nissinen and Gagnon's instinct that Ham's act was not primarily one of lust or capricious malevolence but a familio-political power play, an attempt to acquire his father's authority and circumvent the rights of his older brothers, whom he immediately informs of what he has done (v. 23a).

So far we have seen that the maternal-incest view, in comparison with the paternal-incest theory, takes better account of the nuance of the Hebrew idiom גלה/ראה ערות אב, recognizes the *heterosexual* eroticism of certain terms in the text, offers a rationale for the cursing of Canaan, clarifies and strengthens the thematic links between Gen 9:20–27 and other obviously related pentateuchal passages, and provides a better account of Ham's motivation and *modus operandi*, supported by biblical and ancient Near Eastern analogues.

It remains to be explained how exactly the story should be *read* if Ham's crime was maternal incest. Perhaps as follows: Noah becomes drunk and disrobes in "her tent" (אהלה)⁵⁵ in preparation for intercourse but is incapacitated by his drunkenness (v. 21). Ham enters and "sees his father's nakedness," that is, engages in relations with his father's wife (v. 22a). He exits and informs his brothers of his grasp at familial power (v. 22b), perhaps producing an article of clothing as proof of his claim. The brothers, in turn, act with excessive filial def-

⁵³ See Bassett, "Noah's Nakedness," 236; and Ulf Oldenburg, *The Conflict between El and Ba'al in Canaanite Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 112–18.

⁵⁴ See Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 4; and Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 39–40.

⁵⁵ It is suggestive that the consonantal form אהלה appears to have the feminine possessive suffix (see Cohen, *Drunkenness*, 8, and *Gen. Rab.* 36:7; although the MT points the word according to the *qêrê* אהלו, "his tent"). Cohen, Kikawada and Quinn (*Before Abraham Was*, 102), and the rabbinic sages suggest it is the tent of Noah's wife. The feminine form אהלה also occurs, for example, in Gen 24:67, where Isaac brings Rebekah into the tent of his mother to consummate their marriage. Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine whether the form אהלה in v. 21 is intentionally feminine, or an example of archaic orthography for the masculine pronominal suffix (see Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, 2:161).

erence and piety in returning “the garment” (השמלה)⁵⁶ to their humiliated father, avoiding not only the figurative “seeing of the father’s nakedness” (i.e., maternal incest) but the literal as well. In the aftermath of the event, Noah curses the product of Ham’s illicit union, namely, Canaan, and blesses Shem and Japheth for their piety.

The same objection may be raised against this reading that was raised against the paternal-incest theory, namely, the brothers’ action in v. 23 indicates that Noah’s nakedness should be considered literally and not idiomatically in v. 22. The arguments presented above of Gagnon, Steinmetz, and others dealt adequately with this difficulty and are equally applicable to the maternal-incest theory. The brothers’ action plays on the broader sense of the phrase “to see nakedness.” Not only do they not “see their father’s nakedness” in the sense of having intercourse with his wife; they also refrain from seeing his literal nakedness, and by covering him with a garment, restore to him a measure of the dignity damaged by Ham’s attempted usurpation.

The objection has also been raised that vv. 24–25 imply that Noah pronounced the curse on Canaan immediately, before the nine months necessary for him to be born according to the maternal-incest theory. But the narrator may have simply compressed the chronology at this point, as he does elsewhere. After all, Gen 5:32 (“After Noah was five hundred years old, Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth”) should not be taken to mean that Noah’s wife bore triplets shortly after his five-hundredth birthday.

Nonetheless, it does seem as though, if the maternal-incest theory is correct, the text has been elided or compressed. The ancient audience may have known the full details of the traditional story and so would not have required a more explicit account, or the account may have been edited with a euphemistic *Tendenz* out of deference for the reputation of the patriarch and matriarch. In any event, given the complexities of the transmission of these traditions in antiquity, it is not difficult to imagine that narrative elision or compression has taken place.

III. Conclusion

In the review of the various interpretive options for Gen 9:20–27 above, it has been seen that the voyeurist position, which understands Ham’s deed as nothing more than looking, fails to explain the gravity of Ham’s sin or the curs-

⁵⁶ The word has the definite article. Hermann Gunkel (*Genesis* [trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997], 80), Gagnon (*Homosexual Practice*, 65), and others suggest that it is Noah’s garment.

ing of Canaan. The castration view suffers from a lack of textual support. The currently popular paternal-incest interpretation has much to commend it, but in almost every case the evidence marshaled for this view actually better suits the maternal-incest theory. The heuristic strengths of the maternal-incest interpretation are manifold: it explains (1) the gravity of Ham's sin, (2) the rationale for the cursing of Canaan rather than Ham, (3) Ham's motivation for committing his offense, (4) the repetition of "Ham, the father of Canaan," and (5) the sexually charged language of the passage. In addition, biblical and ancient Near Eastern analogues for Ham's crime are easy to find, and the related passages of the Pentateuch fit together more elegantly on this interpretation.

ASPECTS OF NUDITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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ASPECTS OF NUDITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Sharon R. Keller

The portrayal of nudity in the Old Testament is indicative of an attitude rather than an aesthetic. The exposed human body is rarely, if ever, glorified in the narrative Biblical text. The poetical idealization of the human form, especially evident in the Song of Songs, will not be treated here. My emphasis is, rather, on the body image portrayed by the narrative portions of the text.

The first time the text specifically presents us with a reference to the naked human form, we learn that one should be ashamed of the human body in its natural—that is, unclothed—state. Indeed, the text is so concerned with repressing references to the human form that it prefers to ignore or gloss over any indication of a naked body rather than to discuss it and resorts to euphemisms when, by force, it must mention genitalia.

Nudity at the Time of Creation. The creation of humanity is recounted twice in the first two chapters of Genesis. In the first account, God simultaneously creates both the male and the female in His own image: “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”¹ No elaboration of the details of this creation is given; God creates both the man and the woman by fiat, and the text totally disregards the fact that presumably both were naked. In the second creation account,² man is fashioned

from the dust of the earth prior to, and separate from, the creation of woman: “The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.”³ When no appropriate mate is found for the newly created man, a woman is fashioned from his rib to serve as his mate: “But for Adam no fitting helper was found. So the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman.”⁴ It is not until directly after the creation of woman that the text first mentions that these two people were in fact naked; but the text goes on to say that they felt no shame. “The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame.”⁵

Why should “shame” be denied when none was mentioned in the first place? This denial directs our attention to the fact that in the near future, after the ingestion of fruit from the forbidden tree, the exposed human form will be something that both Adam and Eve will be ashamed of.⁶ In fact, the entirety of the Biblical attitude is summed up at this point: inappropriate exposure of the naked body is shameful whether or not one is aware of it. It is not until both Adam and Eve had eaten from the forbidden tree of knowledge that “their eyes were opened,” and they realized for the first time that they were, in fact, naked. It was then that they immediately made

coverings for themselves from fig leaves and put them on.⁷

This scenario sets up the attitude that holds throughout the Biblical narrative. At the infancy of humanity, nudity is a state that is not perceived as shameful. Just as children are not bashful about their bodies but, upon reaching adolescence, desire to cover themselves, so Adam and Eve, after gaining knowledge and maturing out of their state of infancy, also want to keep parts of their bodies private. They cover their bodies (or at least parts thereof). But this is not enough, and they try to hide their semiclothed bodies from all outsiders—even from God Himself: “They heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. The Lord God called out to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ He replied, ‘I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.’”⁸ The Biblical text implies that the covering of the genitalia alone is not sufficient; one may still be regarded as naked even when semiclothed.

The Nakedness of the Father. The first Biblical story to deal outright with nudity or exposure of the genitals is that of the drunkenness of Noah.⁹ After the flood, Noah plants a vineyard, drinks the wine from his grapes so that he becomes drunk, and then “uncover[s] himself within his tent.”¹⁰ The text continues: “Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father’s nakedness and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a cloth, placed it against both their backs and, walking backwards, they covered their father’s nakedness; their faces were turned the

other way, so that they did not see their father’s nakedness.”¹¹ When Noah awakes, he discovers what his son Ham had “done to him” and curses Ham’s son Canaan.¹² These verses are rife with difficulties, but what concerns us here is Ham’s offense. The text lacks specifics, as if it were being intentionally vague so that the reader might be spared the indelicate details of what may have taken place between Ham and his father.¹³ It is evident that seeing the nakedness of Noah was something that the other two brothers were careful to avoid when they entered the tent to cover their father.¹⁴ So the question remains: What is being alluded to; what is implied by the sight of someone’s “nakedness”?

The term “nakedness” is not the mere absence of clothing, nor is to “uncover the nakedness” just to remove garments. Rather, both are indicative of something immodest, shameful, or humiliating. The latter, “to uncover someone’s nakedness,” is a Biblical euphemism for some types of sexual misconduct—for example, in Leviticus 18, a roster of sexual relations prohibited as being abhorrent to God.¹⁵ The list begins by enumerating specific illicit familial relations; in all cases, one is enjoined not to uncover the nakedness of the prohibited partner. From the context of the chapter, it is clear that the meaning of “uncovering someone’s nakedness” is not simple disrobing, but rather engaging in prohibited sexual relations. This is stated more explicitly in Leviticus 20, where the punishments for adultery and incest are spelled out; note that the crimes are described as “uncovering the nakedness.”¹⁶

Nakedness of Prisoners. Lifting up or uncovering the skirt, thereby exposing someone’s nakedness or genitalia, is a sign of

great shame or humiliation, especially in the face of the enemy.¹⁷ Prisoners are regularly stripped naked as a form of humiliation or subjugation. Isaiah speaks of the Egyptian prisoners of the king of Assyria as being shamed by being led away naked.

Euphemisms for the Genitalia. The Bible does not refer directly to, nor is there a lexical term for, either the male or female genitalia; the terms “thigh” and “foot” are used as euphemisms.¹⁸ The noun “thigh” commonly means the seat of procreation and may, therefore, be expected to refer to the penis. It has been suggested that swearing an oath by the thigh, in fact, does not simply mean placing the hand under the thigh, but placing the hand on the genitals.¹⁹ Then, too, when Jacob wrestles with the angel at what is eventually called Peniel, he is wounded in the hollow or socket of his thigh.²⁰ Again, it has been suggested that Jacob is struck not at his thigh joint, but in his genitals.²¹

The most common euphemism for the genitalia, both penis and vulva, is “foot.” Ruth is advised to go to Boaz when he has laid down to sleep and to “uncover his feet.”²² Again, the text is vague, but the sense is clear, for on the next day Boaz claims that he has already acquired Ruth as his wife.²³ In Ezekiel 16, God enumerates Jerusalem’s abominations and accuses her of harlotry; she is charged with “opening” her feet to anyone who passes by. Here, “feet” can only be a reference to the female genitalia.²⁴ Euphemisms are not solely sexual in nature; the “foot,” or penis, is the male vehicle of urination, and one avoids mentioning it by name.²⁵

Assumed Nakedness. The story of David and Batsheva is resplendent with sexual

allusions, yet within the story there is no explicit mention of nudity. It is clearly assumed to exist, however. One evening, while strolling on the roof of his palace,²⁶ King David chanced to look upon Batsheva while she is bathing. The king finds out who she is, sends for her, and lays with her so that she conceives.²⁷ Although David’s motivation remains unstated, the text observes that she was “beautiful to look upon.” It can be surmised that Batsheva was undressed and that David desired her after seeing her naked body. Again, the text is modest, as if to spare the reader the details of the illicit seduction. Batsheva’s state of dress or undress is not an integral element of the story, and the terseness of Biblical style omits nonessential details. If the text were to give details here, they would involve praising Batsheva’s physical beauty, and such praise would go against the narrative tradition of ignoring positive aspects of the naked body.

Similarly, at the beginning of the Book of Esther, King Ahasuerus summons his queen, Vashti, and instructs her to wear her crown so that he might show off her beauty. Since the text is vague as to the rest of her costume and, indeed, no other clothing is mentioned, traditional commentaries have assumed that she was expected to wear nothing except her crown—that is, to appear naked.²⁸ Vashti refuses to appear thus attired and is banished from the king’s presence so that other wives in the kingdom might not follow her example and disobey their husbands.²⁹

Ritual Nudity. Ritual or cultic nudity was not a part of Israelite religion; one was to approach the Lord modestly clad.³⁰ The closest association with cultic nudity occurs when King Saul strips off his clothing,

prophesies, and lies down naked.³¹ King David, on the other hand, dances before the ark of the Lord wearing nothing but a linen loincloth.³² Although he is not totally naked, Michal, Saul's daughter, sees this as an inappropriate display and despises him for it.³³ As we have seen in the story of Adam and Eve, for adults to appear dressed in such scanty outfits was tantamount to being nude.³⁴

Conclusion. Wherever possible, the narrative Biblical text downplays the natural role of the naked human body, preferring

to allude to it modestly, often implying sexual intercourse, rather than explicitly mentioning it. Aspects of nakedness or inappropriate exposure of the body are considered so abhorrent and shameful as to be associated with sexual aberrations. Within the narrative portion of the Old Testament, furthermore, not only is there no overt appreciation or glorification of nudity, it implies humiliation and degradation: causing someone to bare his or her body can mean stripping that person of dignity, power, and respect.

NOTES

1. Gen. 1:27. Unless otherwise stated, all Biblical translations are taken from *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985). All citations are according to the Masoretic text of the Old Testament.

2. Gen. 2:4b–24.

3. Gen. 2:7.

4. Gen. 2:20–22.

5. Gen. 2:25.

6. The serpent, the vehicle for tempting Eve to eat the forbidden fruit and, thus, to become aware of her nakedness, is described as “shrewd” or “cunning” (Gen. 3:1). This description is a play on words that connects the previous verse (Gen. 2:25), “The two of them were naked . . .,” with what follows. The consonantal text of Genesis 2:25 and 3:1 sets up a pun and uses the same root word (*ʿrm*) to mean both “naked” and “shrewd”/“cunning.”

7. Gen. 3:7.

8. Gen. 3:8–10.

9. Gen. 9:18–28.

10. Gen. 9:21. Both Hab. 2:15 and Lam. 4:21 mention exposure when drunk.

11. Gen. 9:22–23.

12. Gen. 9:24–26. It is interesting to note that this story, unlike the flood account immediately preceding, has no known analogues in the mythologies of the ancient Near East.

13. For commentaries on this, see Umberto Cas-

suto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, II (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984), pp. 158–163, and Nahum Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989), p. 65.

14. For a discussion of this episode, see Leon R. Kass, “Seeing the Nakedness of His Father,” *Commentary* 93, no. 6 (1992):41–47.

15. On this chapter, see most recently Baruch Levine, *Leviticus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989), pp. 119–122, and Fred L. Horton, “Form and Structure in Laws Relating to Women: Leviticus 18:6–18,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1973):20–33.

16. Lev. 20:11 ff. This is not to say that Ham had sexual relations with his father. What is evident is that Ham's offense was grave enough to be paralleled with illicit sexual relations.

17. See Jer. 13:22 and Nah. 3:5. See especially W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah I* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 414.

18. So, too, the noun “hand,” although this usage is questionable. See M. Delcor, “Two Special Meanings of the Word *yd* in Biblical Hebrew,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 12, no. 2 (1967):230–240, and Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), p. 409. H. L. Ginsberg has suggested that the nouns “stick” and “rod” in Hosea 4:12 mean “penis”; see “Lexicographical Notes,” *VTS* 16 (1967):74. I thank S. David Sperling for bringing this reference to my attention.

19. Meir Malul, "More on *Pahad Yishaq* (Genesis XXXI 42, 53) and the Oath by the Thigh," *VT* 35 (1985):192–200, and *id.*, "Touching the Sexual Organs As an Oath Ceremony in an Akkadian Letter," *VT* 37 (1987):491–492.

20. Gen. 32:26.

21. S. H. Smith, "'Heel' and 'Thigh': The Concept of Sexuality in the Jacob-Esau Narratives," *VT* 40 (1990):464–473. Smith suggests that "heel" may also be a euphemism for "penis."

22. Ruth 3:4. See Edward F. Campbell, *The Anchor Bible, Ruth* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), p. 121.

23. Cyrus H. Gordon, "WM- 'and' in Eblaite and Hebrew," in *Eblaitica: Essays on the Ebla Archives and Eblaite Language*, I (Winona Lake, Ind.: 1987), p. 29.

24. Ezek. 16:25. Deut. 28:57 may also be a reference to female genitalia.

25. Judg. 3:24, 1 Sam. 24:4, 2 Kings 18:27 = Isa. 36:12.

26. One would sleep on the roof because it was

cool and breezy.

27. 2 Sam. 11:2–5.

28. On this, see Carey A. Moore, *The Anchor Bible, Esther* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), p. 13.

29. Esther 1:11 ff.

30. See Exod. 20:23 and 28:42–43.

31. 1 Sam. 19:24. It has, however, been suggested that this is a later insertion to explain the phrase "Is Saul also among the prophets?" See P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *The Anchor Bible, I Samuel* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), p. 329.

32. 2 Sam. 6:14–16 = 1 Chron. 15:27–29.

33. P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *The Anchor Bible, II Samuel* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), p. 171.

34. For two opposing views on the appropriateness of David's garments, see A. Phillips, "David's Linen Ephod," *VT* 19 (1969):485–487, and N. L. Tidwell, "The Linen Ephod: 1 Sam. II 18 and 2 Sam. VI 14," *VT* 24 (1974):505–507.



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“HEEL” AND “THIGH”: THE CONCEPT OF SEXUALITY IN THE JACOB-ESAU NARRATIVES

by

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It is the contention of the following study that certain sexual inferences underlie the use of the terms *ʿqb* in Gen. xxv 26, Hos. xii 3, and *ḵp yrk* in Gen. xxxii 26 (EVV. verse 25). A sexual interpretation may lead not only towards a fresh understanding of these verses specifically, but ultimately towards a new perspective on the Jacob traditions as a whole.

I. *Genesis xxv 26*

The Jacob-Esau cycle in Gen. xxv-xxxv is fundamentally a story of conflict. By foul means more than by fair Jacob is determined to gain the ascendancy over his brother. First, he cheats him out of the birthright that should have belonged to Esau as the marginally elder twin (xxv 29-34), then out of his father Isaac's blessing (Gen. xxvii). Much later, at the Jabbok, he even tries to usurp the power of God himself (if such be the identity of the stranger with whom he wrestles) by demanding to know his name (xxxii 30[29]). This thirst for power or dominance, however, extends far beyond Jacob's conscious acts of deceit and ambition: it actually originates as a pre-natal phenomenon. While yet in Rebekah's womb the twins "struggle together" (*ytrššw*) for supremacy (xxv 22), and even as Esau is emerging, Jacob is found to be gripping his brother's heel. The double meaning of the verb *ḥz* provides a clue as to the thrust of the narrative, for behind the common meaning, "to grip", "to take hold", lies another one: "to have possession", "to inherit".¹ Perhaps implicit in Jacob's

¹ Gen. xxxiv 10, xlvii 27; Num. xxxii 30; Josh. xxii 9, 19. Similarly, the noun *ḥzh*, which is often used of a possession by right of inheritance—Gen. xvii 8, xxiii 4, 9, 20, xlviii 4, xlix 30, 1 13; Lev. xxv 34; Num. xxvii 7, xxxii 32; Ps. ii 8; Ezek. xlii 28, xlii 16.

physical act of gripping Esau's heel is the intention to take possession of the latter's position of power and dominance. But what sort of power is it that Jacob is seeking to usurp? Only by analysing the word *ʿqb*, "heel", can we solve that problem; Of course, *ʿāqēb* is related to the verb *ʿāqab*, "to supplant", so there is more than a hint of word-play here, but, initially, at least, the act of gripping the heel may not seem to be the most appropriate symbol for Jacob in his role as supplanter. I venture to suggest that the spirit of the narrative is more strictly adhered to if *ʿqb* is taken in this instance as a euphemism for genitals. Since in ancient Hebrew thought the sexual organs were regarded as the seat of a man's procreative power, the suggestion that in the story Jacob is gripping Esau not by the heel but by the genitals would aptly prefigure the narrative plot as a whole: by any means at his disposal Jacob wants to appropriate his brother's power for himself, thereby inheriting God's promise to Abraham of countless descendants.² Jacob's act of gripping his brother's genitals is symbolic of his desire to assume this procreative power.

What evidence exists for the view that *ʿqb* can have sexual connotations? In Jer. xiii 22 the noun certainly appears as a euphemism,³ for the context supports such an interpretation:

brb ʿwnk nglw šwlyk
nhmsw ʿqbyk

The lifting of the skirt is a euphemism for exposing one's nakedness,⁴ and the reference to the heels suffering violence is clearly a parallel sentiment here.⁵ The imagery of a raped woman is used to paint a picture of Jerusalem's ignominy and humiliation at the hands of her enemies. In Jer. xiii 26 it is declared that God himself will lift up the skirts of his people so that their "shame" (*qlwnk*)—that is, their genitals—may be exposed. And what great iniquity prompts God to do this? According to the next verse it is essentially the people's own sexual excesses—they are to blame for

² Gen. xii 7, xiii 15-17, xv 18, xvii 8, xviii 18, xxiv 7. The promise is reaffirmed to Isaac in Gen. xxvi 3 and, most notably, to Jacob himself in Gen. xxviii 13, 14, xxxv 11, 12.

³ So R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (London, 1986), p. 303; W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah I* (Philadelphia, 1986), p. 414.

⁴ Jer. xiii 22, 26; Nah. iii 5.

⁵ Indeed, the synonymous parallelism is enhanced by the correspondence between the suffixes in each of the two clauses.

the divine retribution so graphically described in terms of sexual metaphor here. Given all this, it is clear that *ʿqb* in Jer. xiii 22 must be used in conformity with the tenor of its context.

Further to this, the term “foot” (*rgl*) and “leg” (*šwq*), both anatomically adjacent to the heel, are also used euphemistically on occasion.⁶ Of particular interest is Isa. xlvii 2 where the phrase, “uncover the leg” (*gly šwq*) is juxtaposed to *hšpy šbl*, a phrase similar to that used of “stripping off the skirt” in Jer. xiii 26.⁷ The euphemistic character of this term appears, in both the above passages, to extend also to those terms with which it is synonymously parallel.

Although the euphemistic use of these various terms is usually associated with the act of “covering” or “uncovering” (indecent exposure), the linguistic evidence for the euphemistic use of *ʿqb* seems assured. The possibility that the appearance of *ʿqb* in Gen. xxv 26 may be sexually implicit should become more apparent as we explore other relevant passages within the Jacob cycle.

II. *Genesis xxxii 26(25)*

Gen. xxxii 25-33 (xxxii 24-32) contains the well-known Jabbok episode in which Jacob engages a mysterious stranger in a nocturnal wrestling bout. Verse 26(25) of that account may be translated as follows:

And (the man (*ʾyš*)) saw that he did not prevail over (Jacob), and he touched (*wygʿ*) the hollow of his thigh (*kp yrkw*); and Jacob’s thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.

I venture to suggest, along with S. Gevirtz,⁸ that in receiving a “blow” (*ngʿ*)⁹ on the *kp hyrk* Jacob was being struck on his genitals,

⁶ Judg. iii 24, 1 Sam. xxiv 3; Isa. vi 2, vii 20, xlvii 2; Ezek. xvi 25.

⁷ Holladay [n. 3], p. 414) has drawn attention to the possibility that the *šul* of Jer. xiii 22 may originally have read *šūq*. This would certainly enhance the parallelism with *ʿqb*—the two words referring to closely related parts of the anatomy—but it should be remembered that the concept of uncovering the skirt, itself a recognized sexual euphemism, appears again in v. 26 where the imagery of v. 22 is reintroduced, and where the term *ʿl-pnyk* shows that only *šul* is appropriate in that instance. For this reason, it is perhaps better to retain *šul* in v. 22 also.

⁸ “Of Patriarchs and Puns: Joseph at the Fountain, Jacob at the Ford”, *HUCA* 46 (1975), pp. 52, 53.

⁹ “Touch” (*Revised Standard Version*, *New International Version*, etc.) is perhaps too weak a rendering of *ngʿ* in this instance. “Strike” is better, but when used in this

and that this had significance for his understanding of the divine promise in which the inheritance of the land was bound to the pledge of procreative power. The following points, I believe, support this contention:

(i) Gevirtz has observed that while *yṛk* clearly denotes “thigh”, the meaning of *kḥ* is rather less certain. The fundamental meaning is “hollow”—frequently the hollow or palm of the hand,¹⁰ but in a few cases the hollow of some other region of the body.¹¹ Thus, the rendering in Gen. xxxii 26(25) is, literally, “hollow of the thigh”. There is some evidence to suggest that this part of the anatomy is, in fact, the genitals. First, it is clear that the most common Hebrew word for hand, *yḏ*, occasionally serves as a euphemism for penis.¹² Such usage is found not only in the Old Testament,¹³ but also in Ugaritic literature,¹⁴ and perhaps at Qumran.¹⁵ One wonders, therefore, whether *kḥ*, another common word for hand, may likewise have sexual connotations. While we cannot simply infer this understanding by mere association, it can be shown—at least from rabbinic literature¹⁶—that a sexual interpretation of *kḥ* was not unknown in later Hebrew thought. Although this observation does

sense the verb commonly refers to being struck down with illness—see Gen. xii 17; 1 Sam. vi 9; 2 Kgs v 15; Ps. lxxiii 5; Isa. liii 4. The emphasis of *ngʿ* in Gen. xxxii 26(25), therefore, may be more on the lasting affliction caused by the blow than on the act of striking itself.

¹⁰ So Gen. xl 11, 21; Lev. viii 27, xiv 16, 17, 18, 27, 28; Deut. xxv 12; 2 Kgs iv 34, and elsewhere.

¹¹ Especially “sole of the foot”; Gen. viii 9; Deut. xi 24, xxviii 56, 65; Josh. iii 13, iv 18; 2 Sam. xiv 25; 1 Kgs v 17(3); 2 Kgs xix 24; Job. ii 7; Isa. xxxvii 25; Ezek. xliii 7; Mal. iii 21 (iv 3).

¹² See the comments of M. Delcor, “Two Special Meanings of the Word *yḏ*”, *JSS* 12 (1967), pp. 234-40.

¹³ Possible euphemistic uses of *yḏ* occur in Isa. lvii 8, 10; Jer. v 31, l 15.

¹⁴ See Delcor, *JSS* 12 (1967), p. 238, citing C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Manual* (Rome, 1955), pp. 144 (Text 52 [= CTA 23] 33-5), 271. For an English translation of the relevant text, see G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh, 1956), p. 123. Further evidence may be found in line 40 of the same text which reads *nḥtm ḥtk. mmmnm. mṭ ydk*, “Your staff is going down; weakened is the rod of your hand.”

¹⁵ See 1QS vii 13: “Whoever has been so poorly dressed that when drawing his hand from beneath his garment his nakedness has been seen, he shall do penance for thirty days” (trans. G. Vermes, *Dead Sea Scrolls in English* [Harmondsworth, 1962], p. 84). Vermes takes *yḏ* euphemistically in this passage, as does R. Marcus “Notes on the Dead Sea Manual of Discipline”, *JNES* 2 (1952), p. 209. But against this view see P. Wernberg-Møller, *The Manual of Discipline* (Leiden, 1957), p. 118.

¹⁶ Tos. Nid. 6.4; B. Nid. 47a, 52b.

not, in itself, prove that such a usage was current in early Israelite culture, it leaves open the possibility that it was.

(ii) The context in which *kp hyrk* appears may lend further support to our argument. In Gen. xxxii 33(32) it is asserted that because Jacob was struck on the hollow of the thigh, “therefore, to this day, the Israelites do not eat the sinew of the hip which is upon the hollow of the thigh”. The expression used for “sinew of the hip”, *gyd hnšh*, is chiasmatically related to *kp hyrk*:

For this reason the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip (*gyd hnšh*)

which is upon the hollow of the thigh (*kp hyrk*) until this day

For he struck Jacob on the hollow of the thigh (*kp yrk*),
on the sinew of the hip (*gyd hnšh*).

This may indicate that the meanings of these terms were intended to be identified. What was forbidden as food was not simply the *kp hyrk*, but one particular part of it, namely, the sinew attached to it. Gevirtz has suggested that the word *nšh* may be derived from *npš*, “life”, or *ʾnwš*, “man”; so the term *gyd hnšh* could well mean “life-sinew” or “male-sinew”, and the taboo against eating thereof would then be understandable.¹⁷ The lexicon of L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner¹⁸ appears to support my contention here, identifying *gyd hnšh* with the region of the *nervus ischiadicus*, a nerve associated with the ischium at the base of the pelvis, and thus on the inner thigh. Perhaps the only real difference between *kp hyrk* and *gyd hnšh*, then, is one of specificity: the latter may be more directly associated with the sexual organs in the region of the *kp hyrk*.

(iii) In Gen. xxiv 2, 9, when Abraham wishes a well-trusted ser-

¹⁷ On the sacredness of the thigh among Semitic peoples, see W. Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites* (3rd edn, London, 1927), p. 380, n. 1. This question is discussed at some length in M. Hul. VII 1-5. For the purpose of prohibition the “sinew of the thigh-vein” (*gyd hnšh*) is distinguished from the thigh (*yrk*) itself. It is the *gyd* which is forbidden; the *yrk* may be consumed as long as the *gyd* has been removed completely. The hollow (*kp*) of the thigh is clearly associated with the *gyd hnšh*, for M. Hul. VII 1 states that the law of prohibition does not apply to birds because they have no *kp*. The euphemistic use of *gyd* as an independent term is found in B. Qidd. 25a where it undoubtedly refers to the *membrum virile*. The sacredness or taboo associated with the *gyd hnšh* was current among other peoples, too: cf. J. G. Frazer, *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild* II, *The Golden Bough* (3rd edn, London, 1912), 264-7; idem., *Folklore in the Old Testament* 2 (London, 1919), pp. 423-4.

¹⁸ *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden, 1953), p. 639.

vant to swear an oath, he has him place his hand *tht yrky*—npt upon the outside of this thigh (which *yrk* alone could mean), but upon his genitals.¹⁹ Moreover, both Gen. xlvii 26 and Exod. i 5 speak of Jacob's offspring as springing from his loins or thighs, so the word *yrk* is found one more to be intimately connected with the concept of procreation. From the viewpoint of the final redactor there may infact be a sense of narrative development behind these euphemistic uses of *yrk*. By striking Jacob on the *kp hyrk* God was asserting his sovereign power over Jezreel's procreative power. But once Jacob had acknowledged God's strength as supreme, God allowed him to inherit the Abrahamic promise, so that children sprang freely from the very loins over which God had asserted his dominance.

III. *Hosea xii 4(3)*

While it is not necessary for us to rework the well-turned soil in the field of Hosea's relation to the Jacob traditions along with all the problems which that matter raises,²⁰ it nevertheless occurs to me that if my suggestions so far are correct, they are bound to have some bearing on the rendering of the statement in Hos. xii 4(3). The Hebrew text of that verse, set in 3 + 3 parallelism, reads:

bbtn 'qb 't-'hyw
wb'wnw šrh 't-'lhym

The *Revised Standard Version*, one of the more literal translations, renders this:

In the womb he took his brother by the heel,
 And in his manhood he strove with God.

¹⁹ This same practise is ascribed to Jacob himself in Gen. xlvii 29 when he urges Joseph, under oath, to take his body back to Canaan for burial.

²⁰ Discussion of Hosea's allusion to the Jacob tradition has gathered momentum in the past few decades. Among the most important contributions are Th. C. Vriezen, "La tradition de Jacob dans Osée xii", *OTS* 1 (1942), pp. 64-78; M. Gertner, "The Masora and the Levites. Appendix on Hosea xii", *VT* 10 (1960), pp. 241-84, esp. pp. 272-84; H. L. Ginsberg, "Hosea's Ephraim, More Fool Than Knave. A New Interpretation of Hosea xii: 1-14", *JBL* 80 (1961), pp. 339-47; P. R. Ackroyd, "Hosea and Jacob", *VT* 13 (1963), pp. 245-59; R. B. Coote, "Hosea xii 11", *VT* 21 (1971), pp. 389-402, esp. pp. 392-97; E. M. Good, "Hosea and the Jacob tradition", *VT* 16 (1966), pp. 137-51; W. L. Holladay, "Chiasmus, the key to Hosea xii 3-6", *VT* 16 (1966), pp. 53-64. See also the relevant commentaries, especially H. W. Wolff, *Hosea* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1965), pp. 266-77; W. Rudolph, *Hosea* (Gütersloh, 1966), esp. pp. 220-30; J. L. Mays, *Hosea* (London, 1969), pp. 161-5; F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea* (Garden City, 1980), pp. 593-614; and the important study by F. Diedrich, *Die Anspielungen auf die Jacob-Tradition in Hosea 12:1-13:3* (Würzburg, 1977).

I do not wish to become embroiled in a discussion of the text-critical problems of Hos. xii 4-7, since that question has been thoroughly treated by others.²¹ My basic agreement with Holladay's thesis should, however, be acknowledged. God has an indictment—a *ryb*—against Israel (rather than Judah, if the paranomasia is to be maintained)²² the elements of which become clear once they are arranged chiastically:

- (i) Jacob supplanted his *brother* in the womb
- (ii) He *strove* with *God* in his manhood
- (iii) He *prevailed/ruled over*²³ the *angel*
- (iv) He wept and sought (*Esau's*) favour

All the elements of this indictment are concerned with Jacob's "having power over" or "being subservient to": he prevails over both man and God. The term *ml'k*, absent from the Genesis account, is probably included here to complete the synonymous parallelism with the preceding line where God is the opponent. The outer limbs of the chiasmus, on the other hand, are antithetically related: Jacob supplants Esau in the womb, but is—ostensibly, at least—subservient to him at the point of their reconciliation. That this latter observation forms part of the indictment suggests that Hosea considered this subservience to be insincere: Jacob had no intention of surrendering his power to Esau; he merely wanted to secure his position by winning his brother's approval.

If we project my understanding of the Genesis account into Hosea's allusion to the tradition we can see that here, too, the indictment against Jacob is not simply against his devious plan to acquire power *per se*, but against his intention to wrest the Abrahamic promise of *procreative* power from the person whose inheritance it should have been. My argument is strengthened by the presence here of the noun *'wn*, translated "manhood" in the

²¹ Especially Diedrich (n. 20), pp. 12-68;

²² So Ackroyd, *VT* 13 (1963), p. 248; Good, *VT* 16 (1966), p. 139; Holladay, *VT* 16 (1966), pp. 53, 56. The name Judah would have been substituted for Israel by a redactor who wished to re-apply the oracle to the Southern Kingdom after the demise of the Northern. Cf. Wolff (n. 20), pp. 267, 273.

²³ The translation here (v. 5a[4]) depends on the root of *yśr*: according to Gertner (*VT* 10 [1960], p. 277) and Wolff ([n. 20], pp. 274-5) it should be *śrr*, "to lord", "to play the prince"; but Holladay (*VT* 16 [1966], p. 56) argues for *śrh*, "to prevail", "to persevere", which has already appeared in the preceding clause (v. 4b[3b]).

RSV, which has the sense of “manly vigour”²⁴ or “virility”, and so is clearly parallel to *bṭn* which also has procreative connotations. The parallelism in the remainder of the distich would then be quite clear. Both *ʿqb* and *śrh* involve the concept of struggle or contention, and if *ʿqb* is rendered “take by the genitals” instead of “take by the heel”, thus conforming more readily to the idea of procreativity embodied in *bṭn* and *ʾwn*, the sexual significance of the verse becomes more clearly pronounced. For reasons which cannot be enumerated here, it is also possible to see the remaining words, *ʾhyw* and *ʾlhym*, as objects in synonymous parallelism, since psychoanalytically Jacob’s struggle with the divine figure may actually represent his earthly struggle with his brother.

Given that the above arguments are valid, a tentative re-rendering of Hos. xii 4(3) might be:

In the womb he took his brother by the genitals (*ʿqb*)
And in his procreative power (*ʾôn*) he strove with God.

IV. *The Theological Significance of Sexuality in the Jacob-Esau Tradition*

It is not possible here to plot in detail the theological development of the Jacob cycle. Fundamental to the narrative, however, is an explanation of how Esau lost to his brother Jacob his right to inherit the Abrahamic promise. The question with which the redactor has to struggle is: how, in view of the violation of the law of birthright, can Jacob’s acquisition of blessing and promise be justified? To be sure, account must be taken of the fact that Jacob is not the only active person in this matter. We are told in Gen. xxv 34 that Esau despised his birthright, and in Gen. xxvii 5-17 that Isaac’s wife, Rebekah, was instrumental in hatching the plot to deprive Esau of his father’s blessing. These events no doubt encouraged Jacob to persist with his ambition to wrest power from his brother. But we must remember that the promise he hopes to inherit is one of land and also descendants (Gen. xii 2, 7, xv 5)—a promise which Jacob himself receives in its definitive form when he returns to Bethel after his reconciliation with Esau (xxxv 11, 12). At this point the significance of the sexual symbolism in xxv 26, xxxii 26(25)

²⁴ Cf. F. Brown, S. R. Driver, C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1906), p. 20. That the verb *ʾwn* has this sense of procreative power is verified by its use in passages such as Gen. xlix 3; Deut. xxi 17; Pss lxxviii 51, cv 36. Cf. the comment of Andersen and Freedman (n. 20), p. 607.

becomes clear. If Jacob is to usurp Esau's right to the Abrahamic promise, he must appropriate his procreative power. His quest to do this begins at the moment of birth when, symbolically, he seizes his brother by the genitals, the seat of procreation. From then on Jacob, prompted by his mother, spares no effort to secure succession to the covenantal promise.

Jacob's years of exile with Laban in Haran (Gen. xxviii-xxxi) do nothing to quell his essentially selfish, deceitful nature. At Bethel he vows to serve God only in return for his protection (xxviii 20-2); in his dealings with Laban it transpires that while cheated himself, he too has not forgotten the fine art of trickery (xxx 25-43, xxxi 20); and when he contemplates his meeting with Esau it is his own life for which he fears. At the Jabbok Jacob's selfish ambition proceeds unabated. As he struggles with the divine stranger he craves a blessing for himself, and when the figure asks Jacob his name the latter's reaction is to demand the stranger's name—a sure sign that he wants to exert power and influence even over the divine visitor.

The change of name from Jacob to Israel signifies divine approval of Jacob's inheritance of the Abrahamic promise: God confirms him as successor to the covenant, and Jacob is at last allowed to fulfil his ambition—but only at a price. Just at the point where Jacob seems set to prevail even over God himself, he is struck upon the *kp hyrk*. Given the sexual symbolism behind this particular occurrence of the term, the theology of the narrative becomes clear: it is only by recognizing the carnal limitations of his own procreative power that Jacob, as heir apparent to the covenantal promise, is allowed to inherit the promise in reality. By striking Jacob, symbolically, upon his genitals God demonstrates that only he has the power to bring Jacob's aspirations to fruition: what he has bestowed he can just as readily take away. Jacob must learn that lesson before his new role as Israel can properly take effect.

That the Jabbok episode is indeed a power-struggle is confirmed by the sense of *double entendre* behind the word *kp*. At one level *kp* is juxtaposed with *yrk* to denote the region of the sexual organs, while at another it may function independently as a term for power. In this latter sense it is frequently used of an act of deliverance into or out of the hand of an enemy.²⁵ Thus, what happens at the Jab-

²⁵ Judg. vi 13, 14; 1 Sam. iv 3; 2 Sam. xiv 16, xix 10(9), xxii 1; 2 Kgs xvi 7, xx 6; 2 Chr. xxx 6, xxxii 11; Ezra viii 31; Ps. lxxi 4; Prov. vi 3; Isa. xxxviii 6; Jer. xii 7, xv 21; Mic. iv 10.

bok is symbolically a reversal of Jacob's entire life up to that point;²⁶ he discovers there that he cannot usurp God's power as he had that of his brother. There can be no favourable resolution to the saga at all unless he leans wholly upon God's strength. He can neither escape the feeling of guilt by which he is plagued, nor overcome his sense of trepidation as he contemplates the re-encounter with his brother unless he first acknowledges God's power over his life. He is compelled to concede that his own procreative power is a blessing from God, not a free expression of his manly vigour.

One final point. We are told that Jacob's encounter at the Jabbok leaves him "limping on his thigh" (xxxii 32[31]). Those who deny any sexual symbolism in this story take this as an indication that Jacob's hip had been dislocated. It should be recognized, however, that in the Jacob-Esau cycle we are dealing with much that is symbolic. Essentially, we have here a dramatic account about the development of a personality, and the sexual imagery is an indispensable factor in its psychological orientation.

²⁶ The concept of reversal is found elsewhere in the narrative. For instance, Jacob the cheat becomes Jacob the cheated when he works for seven years for the hand of Rachel, only to be given Leah instead, and finds he must work a further seven years for Laban's younger daughter (Gen. xxix 15-30).



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The Syro-Palestinian Iconography of Woman and Goddess (Review Article)

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THE iconographical and religious theme of 'Woman and Goddess' has recently been the subject of a voluminous dissertation submitted by Urs Winter to the University of Fribourg, Switzerland.¹ The basic question dealt with by the author is whether or not the ancient religion of Israel satisfied the religious aspirations of women. If we consider with Winter that, according to Gen. 2:22–23, woman was created to assist and help man, that, according to Gen. 3, she played a key role in bringing sin into the world, and that the God of Israel was a male deity, it is clear that the religion of the Bible appears as a male-dominated one. This impression is confirmed by the low percentage (10%) of biblical feminine names formed with the theophorous element $y(h)w$ -/ $-y(h)w$ and by the inferior role assigned by religious laws to women: only the first-born male child had to be dedicated to the Lord,² only the circumcision of a boy had a religious meaning (Gen. 17:10–14), and only men had the duty of making the three annual pilgrimages (Exod. 23:17, 34:23; Deut. 16:16). Furthermore, the woman's capacity to make a religious vow was limited (Num. 30:4–16), and the active role of the woman in the official cult was restricted to secondary functions. These and other considerations of the same kind lead the author to the conclusion that the official religion of ancient Israel was not intended to satisfy women's religious aspirations, which could instead be fulfilled by the practices and rites of Syro-Canaanite religion (pp. 3–92).

In Winter's view, the feminine aspects of this religion are conveyed by the numerous figurines and different representations of the 'nude goddess', supposed to incarnate the 'ideal woman' (pp. 93–199). From the third millennium onwards, this 'Syrian goddess', as Winter calls her, appears under different names and fulfills various functions. She manifests herself as the goddess of war (pp. 217–238), as the protective deity (pp. 239–251), as the goddess performing the rites of sacred marriage and becoming the divine mother and wet-nurse (pp. 252–413). She appears also as the Syrian *Magna Mater* (pp. 414–441) or as the majestically enthroned goddess and 'Queen of Heaven' (pp. 442–460). According to the author, these various facets of the 'Syrian goddess',

¹ Urs Winter: *Frau und Göttin: Exegetische und ikonographische Studien zum weiblichen Gottesbild im Alten Israel und in dessen Umwelt (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 53)*, Universitätsverlag, Freiburg, Schweiz — Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1983. xviii + 748 pages, 520 figs. DM 198.

² Exod. 13:2, 12–13; 22:28; 34:19–20; Deut. 15:19; Num. 3:40.

which basically is always the same deity, embody the image of the ideal woman. The obvious differences which existed between the condition of the goddess, on the one hand, and the average social and religious status of Syro-Palestinian women, on the other, only manifest the incommensurable distance between women's aspirations and the reality of everyday life (pp. 461–477).

At this point, the author tries to answer the question of whether this ideal image of the woman, typified by the 'Syrian goddess', was in some way integrated in the religion of ancient Israel or altogether rejected by it. Its integration would mean either that YHWH had a consort, called Asherah or Anath, or that the function of the goddess was assumed by the personified Wisdom or by the feminine features in YHWH's nature, such as his *raḥamim* or his maternal feelings (pp. 483–538). Winter then notes that the official religion of Israel reacted against the integration of a feminine deity in its cult, condemning her worship as 'prostitution', 'adultery' or 'magic' (pp. 539–625). The rejected goddess reappeared however in the guise of Israel/Judah conceived of as 'YHWH's bride' or in humanized form like Rebecca and Tamar, or the midwives Shiphrah and Puah (Exod. 1:15–20), or even warlike women like Deborah, Jael and Judith, and mediatrices such as Abigail and Esther (pp. 630–655). Lastly, the desacralized eroticism of the Song of Songs humanizes, according to Winter, the sexual roots of the cult of the 'Syrian goddess' (pp. 656–667). In his conclusion, as might be expected, the author admits that the religion of the Old Testament is male-dominated and that the chances of integrating the woman's ideal image in it are minimal. At the same time, Winter stresses the fact that the absence of a goddess and of female sexual elements in the religion of the Bible eliminates the male sexual aspects of YHWH or, at least, relegates them to a secondary place. Moreover, sexual equality between man and woman appears in the Song of Songs, in which sexuality, as Winter argues, is desacralized and humanized (pp. 668–677).

This dissertation, written under the direction of Prof. Othmar Keel, offers a number of new insights and reflects a wide erudition attested by the bibliography (pp. 685–736) and by the assembling of iconographic material (Figs. 1–520). When reviewing a work of such wide scope and richness of data, it would be unfair to single out details for comment. However, some serious questions need to be raised with regard to the basic problem at issue and to the combined use made by the author of literary and iconographic sources from different places and periods.

The question of whether or not the religious aspirations of women in biblical times could be fulfilled by the official religion of ancient Israel cannot be answered directly for lack of historical information concerning this problem. In the reviewer's opinion, the only appropriate and practicable method based on analogy would consist of studying the religious sentiment and behaviour of women who live today in a comparable familial, social and cultural milieu of a monotheistic religion, for instance in traditional Muslim communities. An ethnographical and anthropological study of this kind is quite feasible, but it would not have the slightest similarity to Winter's work, which is based on the questionable postulate that only a goddess conceived as the ideal woman could satisfy the religious aspirations of oriental women (p. 74). Consequently, the aim of the

whole book is to construct a theoretical model of this goddess and to examine in what way and to what extent this model influenced the Old Testament, whether directly or in a 'sublimated' way. The purpose of the reviewer's following remarks is to show that such a theoretical model of the 'Syrian goddess' results from an undue combination of unrelated data and that it distorts the facts.

The first and foremost observation concerns the 'nude goddess'. Winter studies her representations on the basis of the classification of Palestinian figurines proposed by Pritchard in 1943.³ This classification, however, is no longer satisfactory, for it fails to make a distinction between the nude female figurines lying on a bed from those appearing at the entrance of a shrine or standing on a support, be it a socle or an animal.⁴ Besides, while it is true that figurines and plaques of a nude female figure have been found in almost every major excavation in Israel, ranging in date from the Middle Bronze Age to the Iron Age II, these artefacts do not come from a uniform archaeological environment. In fact, while many were found deposited in large quantities in *favissae*, others were discovered in tombs, sanctuaries and private houses, or are of unknown provenance. Some of these figures undoubtedly represent a goddess, but others are very likely 'concubines of the dead' or votive offerings from women who hoped to become pregnant and to bear a child by virtue of sympathetic magic. This interpretation is confirmed by comparable Egyptian figurines from the New Kingdom (1400–1200 B.C.E.) which represent a nude woman lying on a bed and suckling a child.⁵ Such representations expressed the hope of bearing a child successfully, and women who denuded themselves in front of Ubasti (*b3št.t*), as Herodotus reports (II,60), probably intended to obtain pregnancy from the goddess.

Metal pendants with a figure of the so-called Qudshu or Qadesh type were in reality amulets, usually worn as earrings. This is confirmed by the use of the West Semitic noun *qudāšu*⁶/*qēdāšā*⁷ in Neo-Assyrian,⁷ Neo-Babylonian and Aramaic in the sense of an earring or ring worn by women. The practice of wearing such earrings is attested as late as in the Nabatean period, as shown by a nude standing female figure represented

³ J.B. Pritchard: *Palestinian Figurines in Relation to Certain Goddesses Known through Literature* (*American Oriental Series* 24), New Haven, 1943.

⁴ Miriam Tadmor: *Female Relief Figurines of Late Bronze Age Canaan*, *EI* 15 (1981), pp. 79–83 (Hebrew), 80* (English summary), Pls. 11–12; idem, *Female Figurines in Canaan in the Late Bronze Age*, *Qadmoniot* 15 (1982), pp. 2–10 (Hebrew); idem, *Female Cult Figurines in Late Canaan and Early Israel*, in T. Ishida (ed.): *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays*, Tokyo, 1982, pp. 139–175.

⁵ See, for instance, *La femme au temps des Pharaons* (exhibition catalogue), Brussels, 1985, pp. 140–141, No. 66 (*mère et enfant*).

⁶ CAD, Q, Chicago–Glückstadt, 1982, pp. 293b–294a. The form *qudāš(t)um* with *t*, reconstructed in *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, p. 925b, does not exist.

⁷ The Neo-Assyrian form *qadāsu*, with *s*, shows that the word was borrowed from a North-West Semitic language, for a North-West Semitic phoneme *š* is rendered by graphemes with *s* in Neo-Assyrian; see E. Lipiński: *La correspondance des sibilantes dans les textes araméens et dans les textes cunéiformes néo-assyriens*, in P. Fronzaroli (ed.): *Atti del Secondo Congresso Internazionale di Linguistica Camito-Semita* (*Quaderni di Semitistica* 5), Florence, 1978, pp. 201–210.

on a gold earring found in a tomb at Mamshit and on a gold pendant discovered at 'Avdat. The figure represented on both objects is the goddess Aphrodite, identified in Hellenistic times with Astarte. Among the Nabateans, however, Aphrodite is likely to stand for the Arabian goddess al-'Uzzā'.⁸ In view of this longstanding practice of wearing amulets with the figure of a goddess as earrings or pendants, and considering the meaning of the word *qudāšu*, one can assume that the term *qdš* inscribed on Egyptian stelae of the New Kingdom originally meant 'amulet' or 'sacred object' and was by no means the proper name of a Semitic goddess. This is also borne out by the absence of the feminine ending *-t* in most hieroglyphic transcriptions of the word at issue, which was very likely pronounced *qudāšu*. As for the goddess of the Qudshu type, she should probably be identified with Anath or Astarte, as suggested by the inscription of the stele in the Winchester College collection.⁹

In other words, the various figurines, plaques and pendants representing a nude woman cannot indiscriminately be termed 'goddess'; even when they do depict a goddess, the same one is not always represented.

Remarks of this kind may also be applied to Winter's treatment of the West Semitic goddess of war. The author rightly stresses how difficult it is to distinguish Anath from Astarte when the name of the goddess is not mentioned explicitly, but he overlooks possible depictions of other goddesses. For instance, evidence from the second millennium shows that Išhara, known as *'uṣḥry* in alphabetic texts from Ugarit, was also a goddess of war,¹⁰ apart from being a goddess of love, a mother goddess and a goddess of extispicy.¹¹ She was one of the main deities of northern Syria, attested in particular at Alalakh. If we consider that Išhara was astrologically Scorpio¹² and that the scorpion was her symbol,¹³ we may assume that the winged goddess associated with the scorpion on some Old Syrian seals (Figs. 195, 201, 206) is none else than Išhara, even if the scorpion is also depicted in other contexts. Unfortunately, the author of the book under review pays little or no attention to divine symbols and rarely takes into account sources written in Akkadian. Winter also overlooks other goddesses attested in texts from Ugarit, for instance the Kotharōt, i.e. the divine midwives, or Pidray, Ṭallay and Arṣay, the three daughters of Baal, or Nikkal, the Sumerian goddess worshipped in Syria from the third millennium B.C.E. onwards.

Although the reviewer fully realizes the difficulties encountered when attempting to

⁸ J. Patrich: 'Al-'Uzzā' Earrings, *IEJ* 34 (1984), pp. 39–46, Pl. 6:B–D.

⁹ I.E.S. Edwards: A Relief of Qudshu–Astarte–Anath in the Winchester College Collection, *JNES* 14 (1955), pp. 49–51, Pls. III–IV; *ANEP*, 3rd ed., No. 830.

¹⁰ L.W. King: *Babylonian Boundary-Stones and Memorial Tablets in the British Museum*, London, 1912, No. VIII, col. IV:28–29.

¹¹ W.G. Lambert: Išhara, *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* V, Berlin–New York, 1976–1980, pp. 176–177.

¹² F. Gössmann: *Planetarium Babylonicum, oder: Die sumerisch-babylonischen Stern-Namen* (*Šumerisches Lexikon* IV/2), Rome, 1950, p. 94.

¹³ U. Seidl: Die babylonischen Kudurru-Reliefs, *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 4 (1968), pp. 7–220 (see pp. 156–157).

identify the divinities represented on seals and steles, or depicted by statuettes, he does not think that all the features of the various goddesses referred to by the author result in the picture of an 'ideal woman'.

Another problem raised by Winter's book is the date of most of the iconographical material. The great majority of the scenes and figures analysed by the author date back to the second millennium B.C.E., while the documents bearing on the religion of ancient Israel date from the first millennium B.C.E. In fact, nothing can be said with any degree of certitude about the religion of Israel in Iron Age I. The only thing that one can stress is the fact that the theophorous element $y(h)w$ -/ $y(h)w$ is extremely rare in the anthroponymy of the biblical personages who are supposed to have lived in that period. Thus, not a single Judge of Israel bears a Yahwistic name, and royal names with the element $y(h)w$ -/ $y(h)w$ appear in Israel and Judah only in the ninth century B.C.E. Consequently, the problem of the absence of a feminine deity in the Israelite religion of the first millennium B.C.E. can hardly be discussed or illustrated in the light of iconographic sources of earlier times, originating in a different cultural environment and reflecting an urban society which greatly differed from the ancient Israelite patriarchal family and tribal community.

Winter rightly emphasizes that no consort of YHWH is known from epigraphic sources. The term 'āšērāh, used with the pronominal suffix -h ('šrth) and having the plural form of 'āšērīm, cannot be the proper name of a goddess,¹⁴ and 'ntyhw, mentioned in a document from Elephantine after *msgd*, 'the place of worship', is a hypostasis of YHW, perhaps 'YHW's divine service' if the term 'nt, which appears in 'nt yhw,¹⁵ 'nt byt'l,¹⁶ dA-na-ti-Ba-a-/ā-ti-DIN/GIR^{meš}¹⁷ and Ανατραμ¹⁸ is to be related to

¹⁴ These basic grammatical facts are overlooked by authors who defend the opposing opinion. The literature is listed, for instance, in the article by W.G. Dever: Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntillet 'Ajrūd, *BASOR* 255 (1984), pp. 21–37 (see pp. 34–37). The only passage in which the term 'āšērāh appears to designate a deity is 1 Kings 18:19, but all critical commentators agree that the words 'the 400 prophets of Asherah' are interpolated. One should also note that the three biblical passages with the unusual plural 'āšērōt (Judg. 3:7; 2 Chron. 19:2; 33:3) are either corrupt, like Judg. 3:7, where two Hebrew manuscripts and the Latin translation of the Vulgate have preserved the original reading 'āštārōt, or very recent, like 2 Chron. 19:3 and 33:3, where this new feminine plural is used. The basic text of the Books of Kings either does not mention the 'āšērīm at all (1 Kings 22) or has only the singular (2 Kings 21:3).

¹⁵ A. Cowley: *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*, Oxford, 1923, No. 44:3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 22:125.

¹⁷ R. Borger: *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien (AfO Beih. 9)*, Graz, 1956, p. 109, col. IV:4. Cf. idem, Anath-Bethel, *VT* 7 (1957), pp. 102–104.

¹⁸ P. Roussel and M. Launey: *Inscriptions de Délos (N^{os} 2220–2879)*, Paris, 1937, No. 2314. The element παμ is either the substantivized adjective *rām*, 'exalted, high', in Aramaic, or the Semitic noun *r'm*, 'thunder', which appears in Ramiel's name, written *rmy'l* on Amulet 4:2 reedited by J. Naveh and S. Shaked: *Amulets and Magic Bowls. Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity*, Jerusalem, 1985, p. 54. The same name is written Παμηνλ in the Greek text of 1 Enoch 6:7 and *r'm'li* on the Aramaic fragment 4QEn^a 1 iii:7, published by J.T. Milik: *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrān Cave 4*, Oxford,

'wnt' dy bl, 'the divine service of Bēl' at Palmyra.¹⁹ In any case, the East Aramaic variant form 'ān^etā' for 'ōn^etā' is attested, for instance, in the Targum of Onqelos to Exod. 21:10. The construct state would accordingly be 'ānat and, in the reviewer's hypothesis, the term at issue in 'ntyhw and similar names would not refer to the ancient Semitic goddess Anath, who is rarely mentioned after the early seventh century B.C.E. The only certain exceptions are supplied by a short Phoenician inscription from Idalion (Cyprus), *ʾnt wb'l*,²⁰ written on a bronze lance butt,²¹ and by the bilingual Graeco-Phoenician inscription from Lapethos (Cyprus), which mentions 'nt m'z hym.²² Indeed, no certain reference to Anath, spelt 'nt, is known from an Aramaic milieu. There are serious doubts about the authenticity of the Aramaic inscription of the stele allegedly found at Saqqara on which Baal and Anath are mentioned.²³ In other words, the reviewer suggests, as a working hypothesis, that 'nt yhw, 'nt byt'l and 'nt rm would be the personified 'divine service', respectively, of YHW, of Bêtel and of the Most High.²⁴ Winter's explanation is slightly different: 'nt would be the personified 'actual presence' of the deity (pp. 502–505).

In his search for female hypostases of YHWH, the author attempts to find some kind of relationship between the personified Wisdom of Prov. 1–9, Job 28, and Sir. 24, on the one hand, and the Syro-Canaanite winged goddess of the second millennium B.C.E. glyptics, on the other. This attempt again raises a chronological problem, for the biblical texts concerned date from the Hellenistic period. The chronological gap of a thousand years or more makes it unlikely that there is any connection between these Hebrew texts and any of the Bronze Age Canaanite goddesses. If the personified Wisdom of biblical literature has Aramaic roots, as would seem from the fragment of an Aramaic hymn in praise of wisdom in *Aḥiqar* 94b–95, then it was believed that wisdom had been established in heaven by 'the Lord of the Holy Ones' (*b'l qdšn*), identified by

1976, pp. 150, 341. This divine or angelic name already appears in a Babylonian place name of the eighth century B.C.E., where it is spelt *Ra-'me-ël* or *Ra-'mī-ël*; A.G. Lie: *The Inscriptions of Sargon II, King of Assyria*, I: *The Annals*, Paris, 1929, p. 46, line 287; R. Zadok: *On West Semites in Babylonia during the Chaldean and Achaemenian Periods. An Onomastic Study*. 2nd ed., Jerusalem, 1978, p. 51. Ra'm may be an abbreviation of Ra'mi-'El.

¹⁹ H. Ingholt et al.: *Recueil des tessères de Palmyre* (BAH 58), Paris, 1955, No. 37.

²⁰ *Répertoire d'Épigraphie Sémitique* 1210; O. Masson and M. Sznycer: *Recherches sur les Phéniciens à Chypre*, Geneva–Paris, 1972, pp. 110–111, Pl. X:2.

²¹ The reading *b'nt* of another inscription, engraved on a bronze eye flap of a horse's harness, also from Idalion (RÉS 1209 A; O. Masson–M. Sznycer, op. cit., pp. 109–110 and Pl. XII:2), has to be corrected to *b'n*. Cf. E. Gubel–E. Lipiński, in: *Les Phéniciens et le monde méditerranéen*, Bruxelles, 1986, and with an improved interpretation of the name in: *Syria* 63 (1986), in press.

²² CIS I, 95 and H. Donner and W. Röllig, eds.: *Kanaanische und aramäische Inschriften*, I, Wiesbaden, 1966, pp. 9–10 (No. 42).

²³ A. Dupont-Sommer: Une stèle araméenne d'un prêtre de Baal trouvée en Égypte, *Syria* 33 (1956), pp. 79–87, Pl. IV.

²⁴ J. T. Milik: Les papyrus araméens d'Hermoupolis et les cultes syro-phéniciens en Égypte perse, *Biblica* 48 (1967), pp. 546–622, Pl. I (see pp. 575–576). The alternative explanation is 'the Thunder (of El)'; cf. above, n. 18.

Lindenberger with Baal-šamayn.²⁵ This identification is perhaps confirmed by the Papyrus Amherst Eg. 63, in which the mention of the ‘Lord of the Gods’ (*mr ’lhn*) in col. XI, 17 is followed in the next line by a reference to ‘Baal-šamayn, the Lord’ (*b’l šmyn mr*).²⁶ In any case, Wisdom appears as an entity subordinated to the gods and its feminine character is simply due to the grammatical gender of the word *ḥkmh*, which is a feminine noun both in Hebrew and Aramaic. Consequently, it is difficult to see any relationship between the biblical Wisdom and the ‘Syrian goddess’.

Winter’s contention that the Old Testament manifests a strong opposition towards the cult of the ‘Syrian goddess’ is based on tenuous arguments indeed. In fact, while the goddess Anath is not mentioned at all in the Bible — this in accordance with her rare appearance in texts from the first millennium — the rejection of Astarte is limited to the global Deuteronomistic condemnation of ‘the Baalim and the Ashtaroth’²⁷ and of ‘Ashtoreth, goddess / “abomination” of the Sidonians’ (1 Kings 11:5, 33; 2 Kings 23:13), obviously considered a foreign deity. As for the *’āšērīm*, they have no relation at all with the Ugaritic goddess Athirat. They are simply ‘holy places’, either sacred groves or chapels erected on heights, near old spreading trees.²⁸ The inscriptions from Kh. el-Qôm and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud²⁹ provide us with decisive proof that these shrines were also dedicated to YHWH and that the general condemnation they were subject to was the result of the Deuteronomistic reform and of the centralization of the ‘legitimate’ cult in Jerusalem in the time of King Josiah. Contrary to the practice of the royal temple in Jerusalem, the *’āšērīm* could house a cult idol,³⁰ whose shrine contained also the wardrobe of the deity, exactly as in Mesopotamian sanctuaries.³¹ These idol’s garments were continuously renewed by the women who wove them in the annexes of the *’āšērīm* (2 Kings 23:7).

This reference to women should not be interpreted in the sense that the idol worshipped in the *’āšērāh* represented a goddess. On the contrary, the *miplešet* made by Queen Mother Maaka for the *’āšērāh* in Jerusalem (1 Kings 15:13; 2 Chron. 15:16)

²⁵ J.M. Lindenberger: The Gods of Ahiqar, *Ugarit-Forschungen* 14 (1982), pp. 105–107 (see pp. 114–116); idem, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar*, Baltimore, 1983, pp. 68–70 (Saying 13).

²⁶ C.F. Nims and R.C. Steiner: A Paganized Version of Psalm 20:2–6 from the Aramaic Text in Demotic Script, *JAOS* 103 (1983), pp. 261–274 (see p. 264). See also S.P. Vleeming and J.W. Wesselius: An Aramaic Hymn from the Fourth Century B.C., *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 39 (1982), cols. 501–509 (see col. 504).

²⁷ Judg. 2:11–13; 3:7 (2 MSS and Vulgate); 10:6; 1 Sam. 7:3–4; 12:10.

²⁸ For a more detailed analysis, see E. Lipiński: The Goddess Aṭirat in Ancient Arabia, in Babylon, and in Ugarit, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 3 (1972), pp. 101–119, in particular pp. 111–116. The use of the word *’šrt*, ‘shrine’, in Phoenician has been attested once more by the ‘Akko ostrakon published by M. Dothan: A Phoenician Inscription from ‘Akko, *IEJ* 35 (1985), pp. 81–94. The expression *’šl’šrt* in line 2 means ‘who is in charge of the shrine’.

²⁹ The bibliography is given at the end of Dever (above, n. 14).

³⁰ The *pesel* of the *’āšērāh* is mentioned explicitly in 2 Kings 21:7; cf. 23:6.

³¹ H. Waetzoldt: Kleidung. A. Philologisch, *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* VI, Berlin–New York, 1980–1983, pp. 18–31 (see pp. 28–30).

appears to have been a priapic idol, as suggested by the Vulgate translation *simulacrum Priapi* or *simulacrum turpissimum*. Since Priapus was represented with a grotesque body, as a misshapen little man with enormous genitals, the Vulgate translation of *miplešet* is reminiscent of a Bes figure, similar to the ones depicted, for instance, on pithos A from Kuntillet 'Ajrud³² and widely attested in the Near East.³³ This suggestion does not imply, however, that every 'āšērāh contained a Bes figure.

As holy places, the 'āšērīm are associated in biblical texts with altars³⁴ and *ḥammānīm*,³⁵ which are not incense burners but cultic places,³⁶ and with the hill-shrines called *bāmōt*.³⁷ There is probably a difference between the 'āšērīm, the *ḥammānīm* and the *bāmōt*, but we do not know of what kind. We may surmise that some of these cult places were related to sacred prostitution, alluded to in Amos 2:7–8 and Hos. 4:13–14 and performed in the *gab(b)*, the 'brothel'.³⁸ This is most likely the reason why Lev. 21:9 severely condemns the practice of priests' daughters becoming prostitutes and why certain forms of unofficial worship were termed 'prostitution', 'adultery' or 'magic'. However, there is no proof that these condemned cult practices were associated with the cult of the 'Syrian goddess'. On the contrary, ritual prostitution is mentioned in connection with the worship of the Baal of Peor (Num. 25:1–3; 31:15; Ps. 106:28–29) or of YHWH himself (Amos 2:7), while Ezek. 8:14 explicitly connects women with the cult of Tammuz, a foreign male deity. Moreover, the necromancy practised by the woman from En-Dor (1 Sam. 28) has no relation at all to a goddess. Even the Queen of Heaven, worshipped by women according to Jer. 7:18 and 44:17–19, cannot be identified with the 'Syrian goddess'. This divine figure is undoubtedly the same as the Queen of Heaven worshipped somewhat later by the Aramaeans in Egypt,³⁹ and the cakes prepared especially for her are designated in Jer. 7:18 and 44:19 by the term *kawwānīm*, which is borrowed not from Assyrian but manifestly from Neo-Babylonian

³² Pirhiya Beck: The Drawings from Ḥorvat Teiman (Kuntillet 'Ajrud), *Tel Aviv* 9 (1982), pp. 3–68, Pls. 1–16 (see pp. 27–31, Pl. 5:2).

³³ The iconography of these figures in the Near East has been extensively studied by V. Wilson: The Iconography of Bes with Particular Reference to Cypriot Evidence, *Levant* 7 (1975), pp. 77–103, Pls. XV–XVIII.

³⁴ Exod. 34:13; Deut. 7:5; 12:3; Judg. 6:25, 30; 2 Kings 21:3; 23:15; Jer. 17:2; 2 Chron. 14:2; 31:1; 33:3; 34:4, 7.

³⁵ Isa. 17:8; 27:9; 2 Chron. 34:4, 7.

³⁶ We can no longer sustain the opinion we followed (above, n. 28), p. 113 with n. 79, where the older bibliography on the subject is collected. The Ugaritic evidence leaves little doubt that the *ḥmn* was a cult place erected on a height; see P. Xella: *I testi rituali di Ugarit*, I (*Studi semitici* 54), Rome, 1981, pp. 45–46; E. Lipiński: *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 41 (1984), col. 439.

³⁷ 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:9–10; 18:4; 21:3; 23:15; 2 Chron. 14:2; 17:6; 31:1; 33:3, 19; 34:3.

³⁸ See Ezek. 16:23–43, with the comments on the term *gb* by E. Lipiński: Vestiges phéniciens d'Andalousie: L'Astarté de Séville, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 15 (1984), pp. 102–117, Pls. XIII–XIV, in particular pp. 115–116.

³⁹ Hermopolis Papyrus IV:1. See, for instance, B. Porten and J.C. Greenfield: *Jews of Elephantine and Arameans of Syene: Aramaic Texts with Translation*, Jerusalem, 1974, p. 158, line 1.

(*kamānu*).⁴⁰ This proves that the Queen of Heaven was a Babylonian goddess. The cakes offered to her were probably baked in warm ashes and called *kamān tumri* in Akkadian. They are often mentioned in ritual texts,⁴¹ especially in incantations addressed to Ištar and Dumuzi/Tammūz.⁴² It is therefore likely that the Queen of Heaven was either the Babylonian goddess Ištar or her successful rival Nanay, considered the consort of Nabû in that period.⁴³

Winter's attempt to discover the 'expelled' Syrian goddess behind the biblical metaphor of Israel/Judah, 'YHWH's bride', also lacks any support in biblical texts. This metaphor expresses the theologoumenon of the Covenant concluded between God and the people and formulates it in terms of marital relations and obligations. This metaphor implies neither the humanizing of a goddess nor the mythicizing of the woman.

To conclude, the author's attempt to present the rich iconographic material related to the 'Syrian goddess' and to build at the same time an anthropological theory was perhaps overambitious. Winter's mistake, if one may put it thus, was in supposing that the ability to deal with iconographic sources and interpret them in accordance with textual data leads to a better understanding of ancient religion. In fact, competence in the field of art history is only a prerequisite to which must be added an equally competent identification of the major problems and an examination of their historical context. Unfortunately, this part of Winter's work is inadequate and the mass of disparate iconographic data collected in the book under review cannot supply the right answer to the question raised by the author.

As the reviewer sees it, it would have been better, from a methodological point of view, not to intermingle Syrian and Mesopotamian glyptic sources of the third and second millennia B.C.E. with Hebrew written documents from the first millennium B.C.E. The author would have produced a more useful and convincing book if he had

⁴⁰ This was already noticed by Milik (above, n. 24), p. 563. The intervocalic *m* was pronounced *w* in Neo-Babylonian, but not in Neo-Assyrian. See I.J. Gelb: Notes on von Soden's Grammar of Akkadian, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 12 (1955), pp. 93–111, see p. 101, §21: 'since NB *m* in medial position changes to *w*, as in *Šamaš* to *Šawaš*, written *m* (Greek Σαος, Aram. ŠWŠ) and *w* (biblical Evilmerodakh), both stand for the phoneme *w*.' The spelling *kwn* <[*kamānu* proves therefore that the word was borrowed from Neo-Babylonian.

⁴¹ CAD, K, Chicago-Glückstadt, 1971, pp. 110–111.

⁴² W. Farber: *Beschwörungrituale an Ištar und Dumuzi* (Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz 30), Wiesbaden, 1977, pp. 56–57, lines 14, 17, 27; pp. 130–134, lines 55, 125; p. 185, line 35. See also J.-M. Seux: *Hymnes et prières aux dieux de Babylonie et d'Assyrie* (Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 8), Paris, 1976, pp. 436, 440, 460.

⁴³ A monograph on Nanay is still awaited. For her cult in Late Babylonian and Hellenistic times, one may refer in the meantime to the index of the monographic study on Nabû by F. Pomponio: *Nabû. Il culto e la figura di un dio del Pantheon babilonese ed assiro* (Studi semitici 51), Rome, 1978, p. 250, s.v. Nanâ. Particular questions are examined by G. Azarpay: Nanâ, the Sumero-Akkadian Goddess of Transoxiana, *JAOS* 96 (1976), pp. 536–542, and E. Matsushima: Problèmes des déesses Tašmētum et Nanaia, *Orient* 16 (1980), pp. 133–148.

limited himself to presenting the iconographic material on the 'Syrian goddess' with more precise information on the dating and the setting of the seals and of other objects. It would also have been useful to submit the symbols and scenes related to this type of goddess to a much closer analysis. Each iconographic element must in fact be used with the full knowledge of what is certain or uncertain about its time and place of origin, and of what is original or borrowed from earlier artefacts. Then, each scene and each individual attribute of the goddess or female figure under examination should be presented in the light of this knowledge.

Despite these remarks, which bear on the formulation of the working hypothesis of Winter's study and on its analytical part, the author must be praised, in the reviewer's opinion, for the serious attempt he has made to synthesize the ever-increasing Syro-Mesopotamian iconographic material and to relate it to written sources. The reviewer's observations are in no sense an exhaustive critique of Winter's work, but merely an attempt to point out how far Syro-Palestinian studies are from the stage at which a real history of North-Semitic religions can be written.



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THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF ASHERAH¹

by

BARUCH MARGALIT

Haifa

“... aus der Vergleichung der außeralttestamentlichen Belege ... mit den alttestamentlichen ist offenbar die nötige etymologische und lexikographische Konsequenz noch nicht gezogen” (O. Eissfeldt, “Etymologische und archäologische Erklärung alttestamentlicher Wörter”, *Oriens Antiquus* 5 [1966], p. 170 = *Kleine Schriften* 4 [Tübingen, 1968], p. 290).

I. Introduction

The “Asherah problem” is one of the old chestnuts of biblical (O.T.) scholarship, with a venerable history. Already at the turn of the century it formed the subject of a monograph by P. Torge, entitled *Aschera und Astarte*. Still useful as a compendium of prevalent scholarly opinions in the latter decades of the 19th century, Torge’s book capped an era of intensive biblical scholarship characterized by the application of critical acumen and scholarly ingenuity to the limited corpus of a secularized Scripture, with only the occasional resort to the growing but still scanty data from roughly contemporary ancient Near Eastern sources.

Pre-eminent among such scholars and exemplary of this approach was the renowned Semitist W. Robertson Smith, who treated of the Asherah problem in Lecture V of his classic work, *The Religion of the Semites*, under the title “Sanctuaries, Natural and Artificial—Holy Waters, Trees, Caves, and Stones”, with the discussion of the asherah subsumed under the instructive heading of “tree-worship”. First published in 1889, the work is better known today from the revised and posthumously published second edition of (London) 1894.

¹ Works listed in the bibliography at the end of the article will usually be mentioned in the text and footnotes only by their authors’ names and page references. A condensed version of the article was read in Hebrew to the Philological Symposium in memory of Moshe Held in Beersheba on 25 May 1988, and in English to the SBL International Meeting in Sheffield on 2 August 1988.

One of Robertson Smith's principal, if not quite original, conclusions² enjoyed a wide following in the pre-Ugaritic era of biblical studies; and, *mutatis mutandis*, is not entirely absent even from some of the most recent discussion of the problem. This view would reduce the biblical asherah to the level of a natural organic phenomenon or a human artifact in its image, thereby denying it the status of a divine *persona* and the object of cultic worship independent of (primitive) Yahwism:

...the opinion that there was a Canaanite goddess called Ashera, and that the trees or poles of the same name were her particular symbols, is not tenable; every altar had its *ashera*, even such altars as ... were dedicated to Jehovah. This is not consistent with the idea that the sacred pole was a symbol of a distinct divinity ... (pp. 188-9).³

Robertson Smith also cites approvingly the view of G. Hoffmann published a few years earlier, a view which anticipates Albright's pre-Ugaritic position and which has newly won some adherents of late:

Aus der Bibel steht fest, dass ʾšrḥ in seiner rohesten Gestalt ein willkürlich eingeschlagener Pfahl war zur Kennzeichnung der Stelle, an welcher das Numen [Jahwes] wirkte. Das Wort bedeutete auch wohl nur "Ortszeichen".⁴

This view reflects the early tendency to approach the Asherah-problem etymologically, while the patently forced bridging of "place" and "pole" casts into sharp relief the problematic tension between "etymology" and "context" characteristic of much, if not all, subsequent research, in both its biblical and its extra-biblical manifestations. It may be fairly said that all solutions proffered hitherto have foundered on the inability to bridge the demands of literary usage with the *prima facie* requirements of either grammar or etymology. In its biblical aspect, the dilemma is posed by the complete absence of any usage of the term asherah in the sense of

² Cf. already B. Stade, *ZAW* 1 (1881), p. 345: "Die 'Göttin' Aschera ... ist ohne Zweifel aus dem semitischen Pantheon zu entlassen ... die Aschera [ist] ein heiliger Baum oder Pfahl."

³ Cf. similarly Deut, xvi 21-2, where the separation of the asherah-altar-*maššēbā* complex into three distinct clauses results in each item receiving its appropriate verbal predicate: *nṯ*^c for asherah, *ʿšh* for *mizbēaḥ*, and *q(w)m* for *maššēbā*.

⁴ *Ueber einige phönikische Inschriften*, Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Historisch-philologische Klasse 36/1 (Göttingen, 1890), p. 26.

“place”, whether holy or profane. In its Ugaritic dress, the dilemma shows itself in the lack of concordance between the relatively passive rôle of the goddess Athirat as divine consort and a presumed etymology implying a type of activity totally at variance therewith.

The most striking case in point is provided by the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscription to be discussed below. Suffice it here to note that whereas the morphology of the word *ʾšrh points inexorably to a “common noun”, the literary-idiomatic context (not to mention the proximate drawings) points to a (divine) person bearing the proper name Asherah.

That Robertson Smith’s conclusion mentioned above did not sit well with at least some members of his audience can be seen in the lengthy footnote appended to the text in the second edition. It is of interest here because the author envisages a theoretical possibility which, though rejected for lack of evidence, must today be considered a virtual certainty in the wake of newly published Hebrew epigraphic materials necessitating a major revision in our perception of the historical development of ancient Israelite religion in the pre-exilic era.

If a god and a goddess were worshipped together at the same sanctuary, as was the case, for example, at Aphaca and Hierapolis, and if the two sacred symbols at the sanctuary were a pole and a pillar of stone, it might naturally enough come about that the pole was identified with the goddess and the pillar with the god ... There is no evidence of the worship of a divine pair among the older Hebrews ... (p. 189).

Yet the concluding paragraph of this footnote, which comes perilously close to begging the question, suggests that the wall of the author’s defense has been irreparably breached.

The evidence offered by Assyriologists that [Akkadian] Ashrat = Ashera was a goddess (see Schrader in *Zeitschr. f. Assyriologie*, iii, 363 sq.) cannot overrule the plain sense [*sic*] of the Hebrew texts.

If Robertson Smith reflects prevalent opinion in OT studies at the turn of the last century, W. F. Albright, *AJSL* 41, pp. 73-101, speaks for the new consensus which had crystallized among Semitic philologists some three and a half decades later, on the eve of the epochal, and revolutionizing, discoveries at Ras Shamra:

The goddess Aširat (Ašratu, etc.) was one of the principal figures of the West-Semitic pantheon in Amorite days ... as the consort of *Amurrû* ... Among the Canaanites in the second half of the second millennium, Aširat still preserved her popularity ... in the biblical age, we find Ašerah (for *Aširat) as an obnoxious [*sic*] Canaanite goddess and sacred post ... (p. 99).

The radical break with Robertson Smith implicit in the determination of Asherah as a major figure in the West-Semitic pantheon of the second millennium B.C.E. does not extend to the elucidation of the etymological basis of the divine name: in this matter, and with characteristic self-assurance, Albright adds his magisterial endorsement to the view of Hoffmann mentioned above:

The etymology of the name is quite certain ... the original meaning of the divine name is "place," whence "sanctuary" ... Were there any doubt, it would be removed by a careful examination of the ... Bible, where *Ašerah* is rather the name of the sacred post, symbol or shrine of 'Aštar than a strictly independent deity (pp. 99-100).

But Albright, to his everlasting credit, was not one to be shackled by his own prior pronouncements, however forcefully and categorically stated. In the Ayer Lectures of 1941 which formed the basis of his classic monograph, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore, 1942; 4th edn, 1956), Albright advanced an entirely new hypothesis founded, as he believed, on the most basic meaning of the Ugaritic root $\text{ʔ}r$ and its Hebrew reflex $\text{ʔ}r$, an hypothesis which has held sway in both Old Testament and Ugaritic studies up to and including the present:

... since the [Ugaritic] stem '-th-r (Heb. '-sh-r) means "to walk" ... and since the first element has the vocalization of an intransitive participle [in Hebrew], we must obviously render [Ugaritic *rbt. aṯrt ym*] "She who Walks on the Sea" or perhaps "She who Walks in the Sea" ... The abbreviated form, *Athir(a)tu*, was early substituted for the full appellation ... We find the shorter form ... as *Ashratum* in a Sumerian inscription ... in honor of Hammurabi ... Since the Canaanites associated El ... with the underground ... fresh water ... it is scarcely surprising that his consort was preëminently a sea-goddess (pp. 77-8).

That this interpretation of the divine name Athirat/Asherah has endured for nearly half a century is a measure of its appeal as well as the unparalleled authority of its author. However, some voices

of dissent have been raised of late. Thus J. Day, in an essay entirely devoted to a review of the Asherah problem, has elaborated on some reservations expressed earlier by the Ugaritologist J. C. de Moor (cols 477-4; E. tr., p. 438) observing that

... in spite of the wide support that this view has attained in some circles ... [it] presupposes that this [*rbt. aṯrt. ym*] was the original full name of the goddess and that ... Athirat was a later abbreviation [when in fact Old Babylonian] Ašratum ... suggests that the shorter form was original ... Second, this view seems to presuppose that ... Athirat took part in a conflict with the sea, but we have no evidence of this in the Ugaritic texts.⁵

It does, in fact, strain credulity to assume that the land-locked Amorite nomads who worshipped the goddess Ašratu(m) should affix the word *ym* to her official title. But of still graver consequences for Albright's theory is the empirical argument, curiously omitted by Day but noted earlier by de Moor, viz., that Ugaritic *ṣṭr* does not in fact mean "march", or "tread", or "traverse", but rather (as a preposition) "following (in the footsteps of)". This meaning reduces to nonsense any literal rendering of the expression *rbt. aṯrt. ym* as analysed by Albright and his supporters.

Yet in the absence of a credible alternative, none of the foregoing criticisms is likely to dislodge Albright's interpretation from its position of supremacy; and neither Day nor de Moor provides such an alternative. Indeed, by opting as they do for the older opinion once held by Albright himself (cf. above), they reduce the entire question of etymology to practical irrelevancy, at least in what pertains to the Ugaritic material. This is the implication also of Day's statement, correct in itself, that the phrase *rbt. aṯrt. ym* "means simply 'Lady Athirat of the sea'...", i.e., the name Athirat functions in this context strictly and exclusively as a proper name, like Anat, Aqhat, and Astarte, and no etymological inferences can be drawn from it.

Albright's theory is certainly wrong; but his intuition was correct. The etymology of the name Athirat is so far from irrelevancy as to provide the key to a proper understanding of the goddess's role and function in Ugaritic literature. The reason is really quite

⁵ p. 388. Contrast W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (London, 1968), pp. 105-6; and F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), pp. 32-3.

simple: the name Athirat, like that of El, Baal, Yam, Mot, and Yariḥ, represents a common noun elevated to the status of proper name. This is not mere surmise or speculation: as we shall see shortly, Ugaritic literature preserves at least one clear, though generally unrecognized, case of *atrt* used as a common noun, the elucidation of which provides, we submit, the definitive solution of the Asherah problem in all its ramifications, Hebrew as well as Ugaritic.

Students of Ugaritic literature have often remarked on the fact that, though obviously portrayed as the wife of El, the Ugaritic Athirat is never so designated *expressis verbis*. Similarly, though independently, students of Hebrew epigraphy have generally felt constrained by context to render the phrase ... *yhw* ... *wʾsrth* as “Yahweh ... and his consort”, notwithstanding the grammatical difficulty seemingly posed by this interpretation.

The thesis of this article is that a single solution suggests itself in both cases, reflecting as they do different aspects of what we have called “the Asherah problem”, viz., the Ugaritic word *atrt* (= [āḥirat-]) and its Hebrew cognate ʾāšērā were originally, and basically, common nouns meaning “wife, consort”, lit., “she-who-follows-in-the-footsteps (of her husband)”. This hypothesis, if demonstrable, would explain the lack of explicit reference to Athirat’s consortship as a redundancy eschewed by the Ugaritic poets, and at the same time extricate the Hebrew epigraphist from the horns of a dilemma at both Kh. el-Qôm and Kuntillet ʿAjrud. This assumption admittedly raises a phonological problem for the development of Massoretic ʾāšērā. The expected form is *ʾōšērā. However, this problem exists equally for the regnant view associated with Albright. Perhaps Massoretic ʾāšērā is a *Mischform* of *ʾatrat and *āḥirat.

Limitations of space require that we be at once selective in our choice of data and succinct, if not laconic, in our exposition and argumentation. In what follows we shall discuss:

(1) the Amorite *Ašratu(m)* known from Akkadian sources of the Old Babylonian period;

(2) the evidence for a Ugaritic common noun meaning “wife, spouse, consort”, synonymous with (one of the meanings of) *att*;

(3) the phrase ... *yhw* ... *wʾsrth* from Kuntillet ʿAjrud (only);⁶

⁶ For a discussion of the Asherah problem as manifested at Kh. el-Qôm, see my article in *VT* 39 (1989), pp. 371-8.

(4) some biblical passages which allude to “Israel” as YHWH’s wife, and their semantic as well as theological implications.

II. “Amorite” *dAš-ra-tu(m)*, var. *dA-ši-ra-tu(m)*

The Amorite *Ašratu(m)*, best known from a Sumerian inscription dedicated to Hammurabi, already reveals the major traits of her Canaanite counterpart in the Late Bronze Age. She is “wife (*aššat*) of Amurru”, and by that token, “daughter-in-law (*kallat*) of Anu”, the warrior- and storm-god Amurru deemed son of Anu. She bears the title *bēlet šeri* “Lady-of-the-steppes” (cf. Ugaritic *rbt aṯrt*), indicative of her indigenous connection to the Syrian steppeland west of the Euphrates in the vicinity of Jebel Bishri, the traditional homeland of the Amurru/MAR.DU nomads. Another epithet is *bēlet kuzbi u ulši* “Lady of (sexual) passion and pleasure”, reflecting her role and function as a fertility goddess, the epitome of female sexuality and reproduction.

The Amorite *Ašratu(m)* presages future developments in two other respects. The name “Ašratum” figures but rarely in proper names of the Old Babylonian period, a circumstance paralleled in the first millennium B.C.E. where the name “Asherah” is entirely absent from the surviving North-West Semitic onomastica. Her name, furthermore, is variously spelled *dAš-ra-tu(m)* and *dA-ši-ra-tu(m)*, a practice which recurs in the diplomatic correspondence from Late Bronze Age Canaan unearthed at Ta’anach and El-Amarna. Though these facts are well known, they have yet to receive a satisfactory explanation. Anticipating our findings, we suggest that both the variant spellings and the rarity of onomastic witness reflect the indeterminate and ambiguous status of the name as both proper (divine) name and common noun.

A seemingly minor detail also warrants notice in anticipation of our discussion below. Whenever Amurru and Ašratu are cited together, the order of citation invariably follows the rule of “male-first”. This practice reflects a literary convention (the equivalent of our modern-day Mr and Mrs) in the citation of divine married couples attested in both Mesopotamia and Canaan: e.g., Ada-and-Sala; Nergal-and-Mamitum; Sin-and-Ningal (= Ugaritic *yrh-w-nkl*); Šamaš-and-Aya; in Ugaritic god-lists, *il-w-aṯrt* (KTU 1.65 [CTA 30]:5) and (*l*)*b^l-w-aṯrt* (sic - KTU 1.46[CTA 36]:8); and in the Hebrew Bible *ba‘al w^caštōret* as well as *ba‘al wa²āšērā*. Inhabiting as

we do a vestigially male-dominated world, in which male superiority is either taken for granted or eschewed as old-fashioned prejudice, we are perhaps either less sensitive or less objective than we ought to be in fathoming the notional implications of this literary convention. Again to anticipate our results, this convention should be seen as an instructive case of language imitating social reality, wherein (married) women follow their husbands, literally and figuratively.

III. *Ugaritic* *atrt*

The Late Bronze Age texts from Ras Shamra-Ugarit, especially the epic poetry, are our most important source for dealing with the Asherah problem, establishing as they do, unequivocally and unambiguously, the existence of a Canaanite goddess—the Canaanite goddess, in fact—named Athirat, and providing invaluable, if not exhaustive, information about her character and rôle in ancient Canaanite mythology.

The “historical” connection of the Ugaritic Athirat and the Amorite Ašratu(m) is assured by the polyglott RS 20.24 which equates Ugaritic [at]rt with Akkadian *daš-ra-tum*. But the correspondence need not be phonetic; indeed, it is generally assumed that the Ugaritic Athirat is phonetically related to Taʿanach/El-Amarna *ašir(a)tu* and Hebrew *ʾāšērâ*, i.e., a participial *qātilat* formation of the G-stem of *ʾtr*.

Most of the allusions to Athirat occur in the literary texts, especially the so-called “Baal-cycle”. She plays a minor rôle in the Krt epic, and is totally absent from Aqht. In the Baal-texts Athirat appears in her “classic” rôle as supreme goddess [*ilt*], the epitome of holiness (whence her divine-name-like epithet *qdš*), and the consort of the pensioner El, nominal head of the Ugaritic pantheon, to whom she bore [*qnyt*] seventy sons [*šbʿm. bn. atrt*]. Though something of a “grass-widow”, a careful reading of the texts, in conjunction with the Hittite recension known as *Elkunirša*, confirms the epithet of her Amorite forebear *bēlet kuzbi*.

As noted above, and like most of the major deities in Ugaritic literature, Athirat carries a fixed epithet, viz., *rbt. ym*. The Ugaritic tradition is the only one which connects the goddess with the sea. This is obviously a secondary development reflecting the shift of the Amorite Ašratum to a new locale along the Phoenician coast—cf.

atrt. šrm // ... *šdny*m in the Krt poem—as well as her “marriage” to El, the god identified in Ugaritic-Canaanite tradition with the subterranean sweet waters, specifically those of the Upper and Central Jordan Valley.⁷ With El thus cast in the rôle of Ea⁸ and successor of the primeval Apsu, it is easy to understand how Athirat becomes a Canaanite Tiamat, consort of Apsu, whose children are the maritime legions of Yam and Mot inimical to the storm-god Baal.

A telling indication of the secondary nature of Athirat’s maritime role is a passage in Baal-Mot (1.4 [CTA 4]: II:3ff.) where a landlubberly Athirat is seen washing her apparel in the sea before taking off on a (land) journey to her husband El. Thus, even if Albright’s interpretation of the phrase *atrt ym* were linguistically defensible, nothing in the epics could be adduced to support the idea of Athirat as “mistress of the sea”. This role is the exclusive prerogative of Prince Yam, *tpt. nhr*.

All but one of the occurrences of the word *atrt* in Ugaritic literary texts allude to the goddess, either with or without an accompanying epithet. There is however one generally overlooked exception in KTU 1.3 (CTA 3): I: 10-15 (= V AB = UT ^cnt), where the word *atrt*, without an epithet, stands in B-word parallelism to *att* “woman; wife”. In these lines, a dining Baal is handed a magnificent goblet by his butler, Prdmn. Of this goblet it is said (lines 13ff.) *ks. qdš(.) ltpnh. att // krpn(.) lt^cn. atrt* “a sacred cup not (ever) seen by a (house)wife”—i.e., by the (rich) lady-of-the-house who normally serves dinner—“a goblet not (ever) beheld by an *atrt*”.

Several scholars (notably J. Obermann and G. R. Driver) have recognized the difficulty of taking this *atrt* as the name of the goddess; some see it as a generic word for “goddess” as such. But there is no basis for this surmise in Ugaritic literature: the generic word for goddess in Ugaritic is *ilt*, a term used mostly of Athirat herself.⁹

⁷ From Aqht we learn unequivocally that El resides in the depths of the Kinnereth which the poet designates “House of El” (*bt. il*); and the Huleh lake/swamp is similarly referred to as *gl. il*.

⁸ Cf. the Karatepe bilingual equating the two deities.

⁹ Aside from the fact that no such usage of Ugaritic *atrt* is known elsewhere in the literature, the (synonymous) parallelism “woman/goddess” which it presupposes is hardly persuasive. Elsewhere, particularly in the Krt epic, we find *att* in synonymous parallelism with *mdt* “beloved” (KTU 1.14:II:48-50/IV:48-50 = CTA 14:101-3/IV:190-1) and *glmt* “maiden” (KTU 1.15[CTA 15]:II.21-2, generally restored also in KTU 1.2[CTA 2]:III:22-3). The first context deals with

The all-but-insuperable barrier to taking *atrt* here as referring to the goddess is the parallelism:

(1) If *atrt* were the divine name, we would expect **att. il // atrt* rather than simply *att//atrt*.

(2) Even then, the divine name *atrt* ought to have been in the A-line, with **att. il* as so-called “ballast variant”. Nowhere in Ugaritic poetry does the divine name *atrt* stand as a B-word parallel to an epithet: cp. *atrt // ilt*; *atrt // qnyt. ilm*. The former occurs four times in the Baal texts, twice in Krt, always in that order. The latter occurs five times in the Baal texts, always in that order.

Both parallelism and, as we shall see in a moment, etymology, leave no room for doubting that the word *atrt* functions here as a common noun denoting “wife, consort”. A second occurrence of a Ugaritic common noun *atrt* with this meaning is possible, even likely, in the epistolary, unfortunately fragmentary *KTU* 2.31:41 [= *PRU* 2,2] ... *latrty* “...to my wife”.

We now turn to the question of etymology, the clarification of which is indispensable to a solution of the Asherah problem.

Ugaritic, like Arabic, uses the noun *ʔtr* “footstep, trace” as a preposition meaning “following; in-the-traces-of”, hence “after” (in a spatial rather than a temporal sense [= *ʔhr*]). For example:

(1) *Baal-Mot* (1.5 [CTA 5]: VI: 24-5; 1.6 [CTA 6]: I: 7-8): *atr. bʕl. ard* (var. *nrd*). *bars*, “In the footsteps of Baal shall I (we) go down to the Netherworld”.

(2) *Krt* (1.14: IV: 19-20 = CTA 14: IV: 182-3) *atr. ʔn. ʔn. hlk // atr. ʔlt. klhm* “(Lit.) After two, two walk // After three, the rest of them”, i.e., the infantry (*āširūma*) march in columns of twos and threes, each “twosome/threesome” following on the heels of the one preceding.¹⁰

Elsewhere, in the poem of Aqht, one finds a nominal usage of *atr* denoting a “tomb” or “burial plot”, as well as an abstract form *atryt* similarly with funereal connotations. The unifying common denominator of these usages is the idea of “remainder” or “trace”:

“newly-weds”, the latter with a prospective wife. For *att* to stand in synonymous parallelism to “goddess”, it would have to be self-evidently clear that *att* is a goddess. Since this is not confirmed by the context in *KTU* 1.3 (CTA 3):I, the expected A-word in synonymous parallelism with *atrt* “goddess” is *ilt*, not *att*.

¹⁰ Cf. e.g., J. Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch der ugaritischen Sprache* (Berlin, 1963), s.v. 476 (§ III). Contrast G. R. Driver, *SVT* 16 (1967), p. 51, where a misconstrued stichometry leads to the mistaken conclusion that Ugaritic *atr* can mean “with”.

the tomb houses and protects one's mortal remains (N.B.) attesting a terrestrial sojourn; figuratively, they are one's "footprints" in the sands of time.¹¹ This holds true also for the "plastered skulls" to which the lad Aqht alludes in his philosophical soliloquy on the subject of human mortality (*KTU* 1.17 [*CTA* 17]: VI: 33ff.):¹² these skulls are all that remains—as "traces"—of individual human existence. They (alone) are man's *atryt*.¹³

It thus stands to reason that a common-noun *atrt*, contextually determined as meaning "wife, consort", should contain the notion of "following-in-the footsteps of ..." The Ugaritic evidence is not sufficiently explicit on this question to clarify the implications of this determination. For this we must consult the Hebrew materials, both inscriptional and Scriptural.

IV. *Kuntillet 'Ajrud*

The epigraphic finds at Kh. el-Qôm and, especially, Kuntillet 'Ajrud, a way-station on the route from Gaza to the Re(e)d Sea (Darb el-Gaza), have projected the Asherah-problem to the forefront of scholarly interest in recent years. In particular, the phrase ... *yhw h* ... *wšrth*, with its tantalizing implications of a Yahwistic polytheism, has occasioned a spate of publications in scholarly journals.

As was to be expected, the passage of time has served to separate the wheat from the chaff. In retrospect, and in the light of an emerging consensus on some of the more controversial issues, it is increasingly clear that the most insightful contribution is also one of the earliest, viz., M. Gilula's Hebrew article. I have in mind not merely the by now universally acknowledged reading "YHWH-of-Samaria" (*yhw h. šmrn*), but the overall religio-historical interpretation, which sought, to our mind successfully, to integrate the written with the graphic evidence, viz., the inscription on Pithos A with

¹¹ Note the comparable usage of Arabic *ʔtr* to denote "(ruins of) a monument"; see J. G. Hava, *Arabic-English Dictionary* (Beirut, 1899), p. 3a.

¹² Cf. my discussion *Paléorient* 9/2 (1983), pp. 93-8.

¹³ Additional examples: (1) *KTU* 1.4:(*CTA* 2):IV:17-19 (Baal-Mot): ... *amrr. kkbkb. lpm/atr. bllt. nt. wbʔl* "Amrr is like a star in front (of Asherah)/in the footsteps of Maiden-Anat and Baal". (2) *KTU* 1.43 (*CTA* 33):24-5 (ritual text): *atr. ilm. ylk. pnm. mlk* "The king will proceed on foot behind the (statues of the) gods". Cf. further examples (especially *KTU* 1.6 [*CTA* 6]:II:9/30; *KTU* 1.100:77) in M. Dietrich and O. Loretz, *UF* 16 (1984), pp. 57-62.

the attached drawing. He then brought this evidence to bear on the history of Israelite religion in the pre-exilic era, particularly in its north-Israelite Bethel/Dan manifestations.

Basic to the Egyptologist Gilula's thesis is the position that the figures drawn beneath the inscription, despite some superficial resemblance, cannot be interpreted as Bes, an Egyptian dwarf-god well-known in the ancient Near East from the Middle Kingdom down into Hellenistic times.¹⁴ The principal reason is that these figures are bovine, whereas the Egyptian Bes is invariably leonine.¹⁵ Given this basic discrepancy, insufficiently considered in the subsequent detailed iconography study by P. Beck and by others (most of whom have followed Beck's lead), and the obvious contiguity of the inscription with the drawing, Gilula correctly drew the astonishing, and in some circles no doubt disconcerting, conclusion that the phrase ... *yhw h. šmrn. wʔšrth* was intended to describe the two figures, male and female, standing arms-akimbo just beneath, and partly intersecting, the inscription.

We do not intend to argue here the merits of these conclusions which serve as our point of departure.¹⁶ In the discussion which follows we intend rather to show that, on the one hand, the literary context of the phrase ... *yhw h. ... wʔšrth* positively precludes any interpretation of **ʔšrh* other than as a divine *persona* capable of conferring blessing; on the other hand, that the artist(s) responsible for the drawing of the two figures wished to represent a male bovine deity and his smaller bovine consort in a traditional "man-and-wife" posture reflecting the basic meaning of the term *asherah*.

The relevant part of the inscription on Pithos A reads as follows: ... *brkt. ʔtkm. lyhw h. šmrn. wlʔšrth* = "... I have blessed you to [= 'in the name of'] YHWH-of-Samaria and to his ʔ*SRH*". A slightly different version occurs on Pithos B: ...*brkth. lyhw h. tmn. wlʔšrth. ybrk. wyšmrk. why. ʕm. ʔd[n]y* = "I have blessed thee to YHWH-of-Teman and to his ʔ*SRH*. May he bless and keep thee and may he be with my lo[r]d."

¹⁴ Cf. the basic, and oft-cited study by V. Wilson, "The Iconography of Bes...", *Levant* 7 (1975), pp. 77-103 (+ pls 15-18); and also H. Altenmüller, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* I (Wiesbaden, 1975), col. 722.

¹⁵ Cf. also (and independently) V. Fritz, *BN* 9 (1979), p. 49; Pope (1980), pp. 210ff. But contrast Stolz, p. 170.

¹⁶ Cf. however the Appendix below, § II, for the arguments in favour of the man-and-wife hypothesis.

The most significant, indeed decisive, feature of the blessing formula in its bearing on the Asherah problem is that it is stereotyped. The formula *brk l-* never admits of anything but a divine *persona* or agency following the preposition.¹⁷ This conclusion is virtually self-evident when seen in the light of comparative usage in North-West Semitic inscriptions of the first millennium B.C.E., as well as in the Bible:

Saqqarah (KAI 50): ...*brktk. lb^{cl}. špn. wkl. l. tḥpnhs.*

Elephantine (*Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 130 [1945], p. 20): ...*brktk. lyhh. wlḥn[b/m]*

Hermopolis: ...*brktk(y/n). lṗth...*

Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique 961: ...*brk [PN] lhr...*

Arad (nos 16,21,40): ...*brktk(.) lyhwh...*

Ḥorvat Uza (Edom): ...*whbrktk(.) lqws...*

Amman(?) (*Syria* 50 [1973], p. 183): ...[PN] *brk. lmlkm*

Kh. el-Qôm: ...*brk. ʔryhw. lyhwh...[lyhwh.] wlʔšrth*

Gen. xlv 19: ...*brwk. ʔbrm. lʔl. ʕywn...*

At the same time it is clear, as scholars critical of the personal name interpretation have admonished, that the pronominal suffix attached to ...*wʔšrth* precludes taking it as a personal name or even as a proper noun.¹⁸ This, in a nutshell, is the dilemma posed by the inscription, viz., the constraints of context which seemingly require that ...(*w*)*ʔšrth* be interpreted as a divine person,¹⁹ and the no less stringent demands of North-West Semitic grammar which seemingly preclude this interpretation *a priori*.²⁰

The solution comes, of course, with the realization that the word **ʔšrh* functions here as a common noun meaning “wife, consort”, with reference to the divine *persona* whose personal name way, but

¹⁷ For discussion of the semantics of this formula, cf. Weippert, pp. 202-12; Couroyer, pp. 575-85. The formulaic character of the ʕAjrud inscriptions is not restricted to the blessing proper; cf. Chase, pp. 63-7; K. Kassine and J. Teixidor, *BASOR* 264 (1986), pp. 45-50.

¹⁸ Cf. Emerton, p. 14; E. Lipiński, *IEJ* 36 (1986), p. 91, n. 14.

¹⁹ Cf. Dever, p. 30: “Is it logical to suppose that an inanimate object could be mentioned ... as an agent of blessing as the context demands both at Ajrud and at el-Qôm?”

²⁰ Cf. McCarter, p. 147: “At Kuntillet ʕAjrud ... we have Yahweh depicted in the company of his escort, and we have him invoked along with his asherah. It seems to follow that Yahweh’s asherah is his consort. There is no evidence, however, to suggest that the word could mean ‘consort,’ and ... it is unlikely to be a [proper-]name (‘Asherah’) in this context.”

need not, be Asherah (although the choice of term—instead of an alternative $^{*}(w)^{2}sth$ —suggests that the divine name Asherah is implicit). The ultimate and decisive proof of this hypothesis comes from the drawing which accompanies the inscription.

As remarked above, Gilula harboured no doubts as to the male and female sexes of the two figures respectively. The evidence he marshalls is in fact incontrovertible: the smaller size; the circles on the upper chest identical with those on the obviously female lyre-player; and the absence of horns (*sic*) as in the head-dress of the larger figure.²¹ But Gilula overlooked a detail which has only very recently been noted—by Coogan and McCarter—though without the realization of its full significance, viz., that the interlocking hands, which Beck took as indicating multiple artists, are the result of the attempt to draw the two figures in perspective, so that the smaller figure should appear to be standing behind the larger figure. Note how the horizontal “ground-line” beneath the feet of the female is drawn considerably higher than the corresponding line beneath the feet of the male.²²

When this detail is considered in the light of the discussion thus far, one cannot but conclude that not only does the drawing of the two figures portray the divine couple referred to in the inscription as “...YHWH-of-Samaria and his consort (Asherah)”; it also provides a graphic commentary on the word $^{*}2\dot{s}rh$ signifying “she-who-follows (her husband)”.²³

²¹ We note parenthetically that the crown head-dress on the female figure is probably the Hebrew $\acute{a}tārā$ which the “suitor” YHWH bestows on his wife-to-be, Israel, in Ezek. xvi 12.

²² We believe that one may safely venture a step futher: the loop suspended from the ground-line beneath the female figure looks very much like a footprint into which she is about to place her left foot. If this surmise were to be confirmed by examination of the original plaster, we believe that even the most die-hard skeptics would have to concede that the female figure is (an) asherah. We note in passing the possibility of seeing in the Hellenistic *Derketō* an epithet of Asherah derived by stylistic substitution of the root *drk* for the root $^{2}s/tr$ “walk (behind)”.

²³ Our conclusions thus coincide with those of Coogan who writes (p. 119): “The simplest explanation is to take the two standing figures as representatives of the two deities mentioned in the inscription, which thus serves as a caption: the larger male figure is Yahweh, and the appropriately smaller figure slightly behind him is his consort Asherah. Both figures have ... appropriate theriomorphic aspects of the ‘bull of Jacob’ and his lady.” This conclusion is drawn, be it noted, “Despite the grammatical difficulty” (p. 118); how much more imposing is it once this difficulty is removed!



From Z. Meshel, *Kuntillet 'Ajrud: A Religious Centre ... on the Border of Sinai*, Catalogue 175, The Israel Museum (Jerusalem, Spring 1978), fig. 12.

V. Hebrew Bible

It is not our intention here to discuss the several and varied aspects of the Asherah problem in the Hebrew Bible.²⁴ Nor is such an undertaking necessary for our purpose, which is to demonstrate the Bible's familiarity with the notion of a (married) woman as one who "follows (in the footsteps of) her husband". To this end we intend to argue:

(1) That despite the absence of a nominal form ʾšrh denoting "wife, consort" attested (*ex hypothesi*) at 'Ajrud, Biblical Hebrew knows a common noun ʾšr denoting—as in Ugaritic—"footstep", as well as a denominative verb ʾšr meaning "follow (behind)".

(2) That the Bible knows a metaphoric use of "follow in someone's footsteps" connoting "loyalty; fidelity" in general, and the marital fidelity of a wife to her husband in particular.

²⁴ For a schematic outline of the principal uses of the term *asherah* in the O.T., cf. the Appendix below. A good up-to-date summary of critical opinion on the subject can be found in Day's essay.

(3) That the use of marital imagery by the 8th-century North Israelite Hosea to describe the theological bonding between YHWH and Israel may well represent an implied polemic against a syncretizing Israelite cult symbolized by the catch-phrase *yhw h wšrth*, which the prophet transforms by substituting “Israel” for “Asherah”. This transformation is taken up by Jeremiah and Ezekiel as well as by the Deuteronomic historian, and becomes a major motif of biblical theology.

(1) The existence in Biblical Hebrew of a common noun ³šr “footstep, footprint; sole of the foot” is attested in, for example:

[illegible]

My feet have not wobbled.”

Ps. xxxvii 31 “The teaching of his god is in his heart //
 (so) his footsteps (*ʔāšûrāw*) do not falter.”

Ps. xl 3b "...He set my feet (firmly) on rock//
He secured my stance (lit., soles: ʔāšūrāy)."

Whereas Ugaritic transmutes nominal *atr* into a preposition meaning “following (behind)”, Biblical Hebrew uses the cognate noun *ʔtr* as a relative pronoun *ʔašer* (= Ug. *d/d*, Aram. *dē*, etc.) meaning “that-which”, reflecting the basic notion of a “(foot)print” as a near-perfect copy of an object without itself being that object.

Biblical Hebrew also attests a denominative [*pi*^{cēl}] usage of ³*šr* ‘follow (in the traces of)’:

Prov. iv 14 “Do not come by the route (used by) the wicked//
Do not follow (*ṭʿaššēr*) in the path of the evil.”

(2) The foregoing examples establish the Bible's familiarity with the basic meaning and usages North-West Semitic ʔt/šr , thus increasing the probability of its familiarity with a common noun ʔrt cognate with Ugaritic atrt and denoting "wife". The evidence for this conclusion comes from the metaphoric usage of "follow" to denote "fidelity" in general and "marital fidelity"—on the part of the wife—in particular.

(a) In Job xxiii 11, the plaintiff hero expresses his unwavering loyalty to his god and his commandments when he declares:

“I have followed in his tracks (lit., “my foot clung to his footprint(s)
[*baʿššūrō*]) //

I kept (to) his way without digressing.”

(b) In Jer. ii 2, the prophet—speaking for God—describes in Hoseanic metaphor the idyllic “honeymoon” relationship between the bridegroom YHWH and his newly-betrothed (*kl*) bride Israel during the desert sojourn of old:

“I (YHWH) remember for thee the credit of thy youth,
Thy love (for me) when thou wast betrothed;
How thou didst follow (lit., “walk behind” [*lektēk ʿaḥāray*]) me in the
wilderness,
In land unsown.”

The metaphoric language implies a castigation of a perverse spouse, faithful to her husband under conditions of scarcity and adversity, yet wantonly unfaithful under conditions of peace and plenty in the land of Canaan. But it seems to have escaped the notice of commentators, ancient and modern, that the “walking behind” is very much a part of the marital metaphor: Israel showed her matrimonial faith in, and loyalty to, her husband YHWH by “walking behind” him as his asherah. Conversely, she ceased being the faithful wife when she became a *mēšūbā* (Jer. iii 6ff.), i.e., when she turned (*š(w)b*) her back and walked away “from behind” (*mēʿaḥāre*) her lawful husband leading the way in front, and became a wife of Baal,²⁵ following in his footsteps (Jer. iii 20; cf. also ii 19-20, 23a).²⁶

In other words, a faithful wife is an asherah who follows her husband as he walks, her gaze directed at his back. Conversely, an *ʾiššā šōṭā* (Num. v) is an unfaithful wife, the infidelity epitomized by her “deviating” (*šṭh*) from the path trod by her foregoing husband. The *šōṭā*, if she takes up with—i.e., follows—another man (without having been formally divorced), becomes an adulterous woman (*nʿp*); and if she follows more than one man, she becomes a harlot

²⁵ More precisely, the *bʿʿālīm*, i.e., the local Baal-cults scattered around the country, which even gave their name to various sites, e.g., Baʿal-Gad; Baʿal-Ḥazor; Baʿal-Hermon; Baʿal-Perazim.

²⁶ ii 20a is of special interest here: it is a “figure within a figure”. Wife-Israel and Husband-YHWH are compared to a team of oxen in which one of the oxen throws off the yoke and says: “I refuse to work” (*ʿbd* [with Kethib], a *double-entendre* playing on *ʿbd* = “worship”). Was the “oxen-metaphor” suggested to the poet by the (former) bull-cult of Samaria?

(*znh*, var. *znn*); whence the figurative idiom of apostasy ... *znh ḥry*, lit., “whore behind/after...”, with the preposition *ḥr* preserving the metaphoric residue of “walking behind”.²⁷

The theological metaphor of “adultery”, originating with Hosea (cf. immediately), is of course bolstered by the fact that YHWH’s main competitor for Israel’s affections in Canaan is the ever-popular storm-god Hadad, better known as “Baal”—a term meaning “husband” as well as “master, lord”. Thus the act of “following Baal” is a *double-entendre*, evoking the image of a (married) woman walking behind her husband while alluding to the nuptial aspect of the Baal-Astarte fertility cult. Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and Kh. el-Qôm provide eloquent testimony to the pervasive influence of the Baal-Astarte fertility cult, and its paradigmatic man-and-wife symbolism.

(3) The 8th-century, purportedly North Israelite Hosea the son of Be’erî was apparently the first of the classical prophets to define the theological covenant between YHWH and Israel in terms of a wedding contract. In this theology, subsequently elaborated by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, YHWH found Israel, a slave-girl in Egypt, and redeemed and took her to his desert home, where he bathed, dressed, and then wed her. As a wedding present he gave her the land of Canaan.²⁸

But permanent residence in Canaan, and a daily exposure to the “sophisticated” fertility cult of the indigenous peoples, led wife-Israel to adulterous behaviour. Instead of “walking behind” her lawful husband, Israel followed a series of ostensibly provident lovers (Hos. ii 7):

²⁷ Note that, unlike Ugaritic, Biblical Hebrew uses the preposition *ḥr* both in a spatial and in a temporal sense, the prepositional use of *ḥr* having either been lost after 1200 B.C.E. or fallen into disuse thereafter. In Hos. iv 12 the poet substitutes *mittaḥat* for *mē’ahārē* in order to preserve the metaphoric symmetry with the reality of Israel’s “sacrificing under (Asherah)-trees”. Note the emphasis on *’ēlā* in v. 13, probably playing on Asherah = Ēlah (Ug. *ilt*) “whose ‘shade’ (/‘pubic triangle’ [cf. Hestrin (n. 37), p. 215] is good”. With this substitution, the basic walking-metaphor is transformed into the supine act of copulation.

²⁸ Cf. Jer. iii 19, where wife-Israel is compared by husband-YHWH to his “sons” (with rights of inheritance): “And I said: ‘How (well) I treated thee, like a son / (How) I gave thee a coveted (*ḥmd*) land / A coveted (*šbh*) inheritance ...’ / And I thought (lit., ‘said (to myself)’): ‘Thou wilt call me ‘Daddy’ (and not ‘Master’ [= *ba’al*]; cf. Hos. ii 18) / And never wilt thou stray (lit., ‘turn’) from my path (lit., ‘behind me’ [as I walk]).’ Here the metaphor ends; but the continuation is instructive nonetheless: “Indeed <as> a (married) woman cheats her companion / so did you cheat me, O House of Israel.”

“For she said:

‘I’ll follow (ʔēlekā ʔahārē) my lovers,
They who provide my bread and water.’ ”

The “following-wife” motif continues in Hos. ii 8-9: speaking for the cuckolded YHWH, the prophet vows to “fence in” the wanton spouse:

“Therefore, behold I will put up a hedge of thorn bushes on ⟨her⟩
path,
And I will erect a (stone) fence so that she will not find her way
(to her lovers).”

Thus confined, wife-Israel will, it is hoped, return to her original husband and true provider:

“And she will say:
I will go back to my first husband,
For then I fared better than now.
And she was unaware that it was I who gave her (all along),
The corn, the wine, and the oil.”

But in the event that these measures of confinement prove insufficient, the husband YHWH²⁹ envisages a more radical solution: he will lure—lit., “seduce”—wife-Israel back to the desert (ii 16ff.), away from the temptations and corrupting influence of a Baal-infested Canaan, in the (desperate) hope that she will “respond” (sexually),³⁰ as in former times, to his love(-making):

“Therefore behold I shall lure her and lead her to the desert...,
And she will ‘respond’ there as in the days of her youth...;
And on that day...thou wilt address me as ‘my man’ and no...longer
as ‘master/husband’...;
And I will espouse thee forever...”

²⁹ Note how tenaciously YHWH fights to hold on to his wife Israel, evidencing his intense love for her. This contrasts, of course, with the covenant theology in which such emotions have no place, and where the suzerain is purportedly doing the vassal a great favour by consenting to be his overlord.

³⁰ ʕnh: cf. below, § IV. Pace A. Deem, *JSS* 23 (1970), pp. 25-8, I believe that ʕnh as used here and in Exodus is a euphemism rather than a literal denotation of sexual intercourse, comparable to *b(w)ʔʔl* and *ydʕʔt*, and thus cannot be considered the etymon of the divine name Anath (mis)conceived as a goddess of sex and fecundity. It is nevertheless conceivable, and possible, that a common semantic denominator connects the notions of verbal and sexual reponse respectively, such as “open up, part”; cf. Ugaritic *prq* + *lšb* = “part the mouth/lips” (to speak, laugh, etc.) and the modern (?) *labia pudendi*.

Note well (a) the use of *hlk* (here in the Hiphil causative) rather than (e.g.) *lqh*: YHWH leads the way for his wife as she follows behind; cf. similarly Jer. ii 17; (b) the clear implication of syncretism: even the ostensibly devout Yahwists, such as Uriyahu of Kh. el-Qôm, worship YHWH as if he were “Baal”, i.e., as a male fertility god in need presumably of a female partner. It is not so much a case of Baal replacing YHWH in Israel’s worship as of his transforming YHWH into his own image.

The question which arises today, following the discoveries at K. ‘Ajrud and Kh. el-Qôm, is whether we are justified in assuming a direct connection and possible influence between Hosea’s nuptial metaphors and the corresponding language and imagery epitomized by the phrase ... *yhw h w³srth*. Consider: (a) it is likely that the Hebrew inscriptions from K. ‘Ajrud and Kh. el-Qôm date to the same (half-)century as the prophet Hosea.³¹ (b) Hosea is full of invective against the bull-cult of Samaria (cf. viii 5) which he obviously knew well. This is the same bull-cult which, as Gilula and others have argued, is reflected at K. ‘Ajrud. (c) If J. Wellhausen’s emendation in Hos. xiv 9 is accepted even in part—reading *w³rtw* for the MT’s ... *w³swrn(n)w³*³²—we have virtual proof of the prophet’s familiarity with the underlying concept, if not the actual phrase, *yhw h w³srth*.

On the basis of these considerations, one may venture the surmise that the prophet Hosea, confronted by the enormous popularity of the syncretistic Yahwism in evidence at K. ‘Ajrud and Kh. el-Qôm by the mid-8th century, took over the idea and the imagery implied by *yhw h w³srth* and made it the cornerstone of a new Israelite theology.³³ YHWH has indeed an asherah—i.e., a

³¹ Cf. Lemaire (1984), p. 135; idem (1977), pp. 602-3. The criteria of dating are both archaeological and palaeographic, with emphasis on the latter.

³² Cf. now Weinfeld (1984), p. 122; Ackroyd, p. 252, and earlier O. Eissfeldt, *BiOr* 27 (1970), p. 293. For our own views on this question, see the Appendix below.

³³ The germ of a similar idea may be found in the following statement by Ackroyd, p. 253, which has since come to my attention: “[T]he material [in Hos. ii] may be making deliberate allusion to the goddess [Asherah] and to some process of rethinking the relationship between deity and people which incorporates the ideas which belong to the concept of god[-]and[-]escort.” Contrast the (pre-‘Ajrud) position of H. W. Wolff, *Hosea* (Philadelphia, 174), p. xxvi = *Dodekpropheton I: Hosea* (Neukirchen, 1961), pp. xviii-xix, who, while cognizant of the mythological basis of “the marriage parable”, maintains that the “legal categories of covenantal thought replace the mythico-cultic fertility concepts that are rooted in the *hieros gamos* ...” We must also respectfully differ from

wife—named “Israel”, a former slave-girl whom he wed in his native Sinai where the couple spent a wonderful honeymoon. But no sooner did YHWH put a solid roof over her head in Canaan than she became unfaithful, straying from her husband’s path and following (an)other god(s) as her husband(s).³⁴

VI. *Conclusions*

(1) The Hebrew word *ʾāšērā*, like its Ugaritic and Amorite-Akkadian cognates, represents a long-forgotten North-West Semitic noun derived from (denominative) *ʾṯr* “follow behind (in someone’s footsteps)” and denoting “wife, consort”, synonymous with *att* but more particularized. The variant forms of Amorite-Akkadian, *ašir(a)tu(m)* and *ašratu(m)* reflect different nominal formations: (a) **aširāt* = a participial (G) **qātilat*, describing the act of “walking behind”; (b) *atrāt* - is a basic *qatlat* formation modelled on *attat* < **antat* - “woman” (> **nṯ* “be weak” [Akk. *enēšu*, Heb. *ʾānūš*]). The Ugaritic goddess Athirat, like her Amorite predecessor and counterpart, derives her name from her religious function and literary-mythological role as consort of El. Just as El is the prototypical “god” (a word whose etymology implies “strength”), and Baal is the prototypical “lord/husband” (implying (male) fertility), so Athirat is the prototypical “wife”, embodying and epitomizing female sexuality and procreativity.

(2) At K. ‘Ajrud, and probably at contemporary Kh. el-Qôṁ, the phrase *yhwḥ ... wʾšrth* means simply, and literally, “YHWH and his consort”, with the term *ʾšrth* possibly implying identification with the Ugaritic Athirat (and with YHWH thus identified as El and/or Baal). The artist responsible for the companion drawing

M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20* (Garden City, 1983), pp. 297-8, when he states: “The figure of Israel as YHWH’s wife derives from the cardinal commandment that Israel worship YHWH alone. To that demand of exclusive fidelity, the obligation of a wife to a husband offered a parallel.”

³⁴ Cf. already G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 2 (Edinburgh and London, 1965), p. 141 = *Theologie des Alten Testaments* 2 (Munich, 1960), p. 152, who correctly insists that Hosea drew his inspiration for Yahweh’s “covenant of love” with Israel from “the rites of the Canaanite nature religion” rather than from his own personal life. By clarifying the religious milieu of Hosea, the material from ‘Ajrud and el-Qôṁ enables us both to understand how such crass mythological ideas were mediated, and thus legitimated, by means of a syncretizing Yahwism, and to appreciate the fact that, for all its audacity and radicality, Hosea’s marital theology was a move in the direction of “orthodoxy” rather than apostasy.

on Pithos A interpreted the phrase by portraying the smaller female figure as walking behind the larger male figure, her husband, and, very likely, about to plant her (left) foot in his footprint. The bovine features of the couple, contrasting with the leonine features of the traditional Egyptian Bes, tally with what we know of both Baal and El in Ugaritic literature: the one occasionally transformed into a bull, the other bearing the formulaic epithet “Bull-El”. These features are also fully consistent with the existence of Yahwistic bull-cults at the North Israelite shrines of Bethel and Dan, both apparently of venerable Canaanite ancestry.

(3) Although there is no unambiguous attestation of *ʾāšērā* meaning “wife” in the Hebrew Bible—the many O.T. references allude invariably to the goddess, her iconic image or her arboreal symbol—several passages seem to presuppose the knowledge of such a term, including its etymological signification (or at least the social reality which underlies and generates the term). These passages deal with the theme of YHWH’s relationship to Israel which they metaphorize in matrimonial terms.

(4) The idea of Israel as YHWH’s wife, first encountered in the writings of Hosea in the 8th century, may have originated as a polemical response to the pervasive catch-phrase *yhwh wʾsrth* of contemporary Hebrew inscriptions, reflecting a religious syncretism which threatened to transform Yahwism into a *bona fide* Canaanite fertility cult centering on the storm-god Baal and his consort Astarte. Prophets of subsequent generations will develop the polemically-born idea of Israel as YHWH’s betrothed into a major tenet of Israelite religion, vying for theological primacy with the older legalistic notions and imagery of “covenant theology”. With Ezekiel, Israel’s relation to God comes to be defined as much in terms of Eros as in terms of Nomos.³⁵ If Israel is YHWH’s wife,

³⁵ Even so perceptive an exegete as W. Zimmerli has failed to recognize Ezek. xvi for what it really is, viz., the fullest and most eloquent articulation of Hosea’s marital theology. Ezekiel’s allegory deals not with the city of Jerusalem conventionally conceived of (because of its feminine gender) as a “daughter” (Hebrew *bat*) but with the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Hebrew **yôšbê yʾrušālayim*) conceived of metonymously as the people of Israel. The feminine gender of “city” facilitates the metaphoric transition to the normally masculine “Israel” as bride and wife (neither of which is implicit in the Hebrew *bat*). The entire pericope in vss 1-43 (the formal limits of the literary unit) is thus a continuous and remarkably consistent allegory. Pace Zimmerli, the gap between the metaphor and the implied reality never disappears even when the allegory is at its most transparent (e.g., vs. 26-8). But this realization presupposes that one has correctly identified the underlying metaphor.

she owes him obedience and respect, but also love and fidelity. YHWH, for his part, is obligated to care for and shelter Israel, and to love her. Obedience to God remains a constant of marital no less than of covenantal theology; but the underlying motive shifts subtly but significantly from one of strict duty to a sense of obligation inspired by love and devotion.³⁶

It is thus not “legality” alone which binds YHWH to Israel; and it is not only in the name of a broken treaty and a metaphoric lawsuit that the prophets reprove Israel. When Jeremiah speaks of *m^cšūbā yīśrā’ēl* he is using the language of (unrequited) love rather than law. For him, as for Ezekiel (chs xvi and xxiii), Israel’s sin is that of an unfaithful wife unappreciative of the loving care lavished on her by a doting husband.

APPENDIX

I. The use of the term “asherah” in the Hebrew Bible

1. The “asherah” as something “organic” planted beside an altar:

(a) Deut. xvi 21 “You shall not plant (*nī^c*) for yourself an asherah [gloss: any tree] beside an altar of YHWH ... You shall not erect for yourself a *maššēbā* ...”

(b) Judg. vi 25-6: “... destroy the altar of Baal ... and cut down (*krt*) the asherah which is over it (*‘ālāw*) ... and make a burnt offering, using the wood of the asherah which you have chopped down”.

³⁶ Compare and contrast the treatment of this material by, for example, W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* 1 (London, 1961), p. 141 = *Theologie des Alten Testaments* 1 (7th edn, Stuttgart and Göttingen, 1962), pp. 250-1, where the theological shift from a “covenant of Law” to a “covenant of Love” is thought to involve a dehistoricizing of YHWH’s relationship with Israel, and its removal from the sphere of the public and national to that of the private and individual. He thus fails to see that the “covenant of love” is couched in the metaphoric language of marital union between the husband YHWH and his chosen wife, the people of Israel, a relationship in which the love and fidelity of the wife are measured in terms of outward manifestations of devotion and obedience epitomized in the act of “walking behind”. Conversely, the wife-Israel sins when she deviates publicly from her husband’s path and follows the ways of the Canaanite fertility cults. The kind of inward religion and divine-human encounter described by Eichrodt in the name of Hosea and Jeremiah is more a mirror-reflection of his own theological viewpoint and commitment than it is of these Israelite prophets.

Cf. also LXX (ἄλσος, δένδρον); Vulg. (*lucus*; *nemus*); Talmud: e.g., B. Erubin 79B-80A: “What is an ordinary asherah (-tree)? Rav said: ‘That (tree) which pagan priests watch over and don’t eat of its fruit.’ Samuel said: ‘For instance, (a tree) of which it is said: ‘These dates are intended for (making) beer in the temple of *nsrpy*’ where [the pagans] drink it on their feast-day.’”³⁷

2. “Asherah” as the name of a divine *persona*:

(a) 1 Kgs xv 13: “... because she had made a *miplešet* for (the goddess) Asherah. Asa chopped up the *miplešet* and burnt it ...”

(b) 1 Kgs xviii 19: “... the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah”. Unless Asherah is a mistake for Ashtoreth, we should at least consider the possibility that the term “Asherah” means here “(divine) Consort” rather than the proper name Asherah. This surmise is valid, indeed more so in view of the Massoretic punctuation, for the use of the phrase “(the) Baal and (the) Asherah” in 2 Kgs xxiii 4 (immediately below).

(c) 2 Kgs xxiii 4ff.: “Then the king ordered ... to remove from the Temple-hall (*hēkāl*) all the vessels which had been made for (the worship of) Baal and Asherah (lit., for the Baal and the Asherah) and all the heavenly host, and he burned them ... He removed the (idol of) Asherah from the House of YHWH ... and burned it ... He smashed the alcoves of the *qdšym* located in the House of YHWH where the women were weaving *btym* for (the goddess/idol of) Asherah.”

3. “Asherah” as “shorthand” for “idol (*pesel*) of (divine name) Asherah”:

(a) 1 Kgs xvi 33: “... Ahab made (*śh*) the (idol of) Asherah ...”

³⁷ Cf. most recently R. Hestrin, “The Lachish Ewer and the ‘Asherah’”, *IEJ* 37 (1987), pp. 212-23, who argues persuasively, if not conclusively, that the arboreal representations on the (putatively) 13th century jug are the symbol of the goddess Asherah to whom the accompanying inscription refers (according to F. M. Cross) as *ʾlt* (Ug. *ilt*). Note the importance that Hestrin attaches to the fact that the word *ʾlt* “is written above one of the trees drawn on the ewer”. We have used a similar argument for interpreting the divine couple at ‘Ajrud, as well as the word (*w*)*ʾrth* at el-Qōm (cf. our discussion in *VT* 39 [1989], pp. 371-8). Both Hestrin and Hadley (pp. 180-211) see in the picture of the stylized tree flanked by two ibexes (Pithos A) a symbolic representation of Asherah, a suggestion which seems eminently plausible if not conclusively demonstrable. Cf. also R. A. Oden, *Studies in Lucian’s De Dea Syria* (Missoula, 1977), pp. 109-55; S. Schroer, *In Israel gab es Bilder* (Fribourg and Göttingen, 1987), pp. 22-45.

(b) 2 Kgs xxi 3ff.: "... and he made the (idol of) Asherah as had Ahab ... (vs. 7) and he placed the idol (*pesel*) of Asherah which he had made in the Temple ..."

II. Kuntillet 'Ajrud

A. Arguments in favour of identifying the two foreground figures on Pithos A as "man-and-wife", with special reference to Beck:

(1) The figure on the right is smaller and has circles on the upper chest suggesting female breasts. This latter feature is also found on the seated lyre-player whose femininity is assured by her head-dress and long skirt.

(2) The "loop" suspended between the legs of both figures is almost certainly an animal tail rather than a phallus, reflecting the "lion-skin" motif of Bes figures generally, but here functioning as part of the bovine characterization of the figures.

(3) While it can be argued (though with considerable difficulty) that the thick vertical lines running from the chin to the torso of the larger figure is a stylized beard—similar lines on the lyre-player suggest otherwise—this is hardly true of the smaller figure, where the much thinner vertical lines extend from the nose, rather than the chin.

(4) If the two figures are male, one is hard put to explain the differences in head-dress. That male and female Bes figures do not appear side by side before the Ptolemaic period—thus Beck—cannot be adduced as counter-evidence, since it is quite obvious, and generally conceded, that the figures are "unlike anything known so far in the Levant" (Beck, p. 30), thus precluding deductive arguments from alleged normativity. *Pace* Beck, the following iconographic conclusions may be drawn:

(i) The two figures are intended to depict male and female *personae*. The femininity of the female figure is indicated by her smaller size, circular breasts, and her position slightly behind the larger figure.

(ii) The figures are Bes-like, but not properly Bes. The Bes-like features are the dwarfish size—including the disproportion between head and torso—the arms akimbo, the bandy legs, and tail; perhaps also the feathered (?) head-dress of the male (with atypical superimposed horns). Non-Bes features include the bovine characteriza-

tion, the “duet” format, the crown head-dress of the female, and the absence of a beard (certainly for the female, probably for the male).

B. Is there a valid reason for doubting that the drawings adjacent to the inscription illustrate it? Beck has written (p. 46):

... when we come to examine whether there was a direct relationship between the drawings and the inscription in the sense that one might be an illustration of the other, we are confronted by difficulties ... The brush used by the scribe who wrote above [the two] figures was ... very thin and his handwriting beautifully cursive, in contrast to the thick brush employed for the awkwardly drawn Bes figures ... Since the inscription was added after both figures were drawn ... it is doubtful whether there is any meaningful relationship between it and the figures.

Against this conclusion may be urged the following:

(1) The assumption that there exists a “meaningful relationship” between the inscription and the two figures does not require the prior assumption either of single or of simultaneous composition. Two men (or women) might have worked at different times on the pithos, the time differential to be measured either in minutes or in days.

(2) A conclusion so far-reaching as Beck’s cannot be considered proven without reference to the contents of the inscription. Yet this lies outside Beck’s stated purpose, which is “to describe each motif [of the drawings] and analyze it in the broader context of Near Eastern iconography” (p. 4). Methodologically, there exists an *a priori* presupposition in favour of connecting an inscription with a contiguous drawing. The burden of proof rests on those who would argue the converse.

The only seemingly serious problem which arises in this connection is the role of the lyre-player of which the inscription makes no mention.³⁸ Far from precluding, however, the reading of the inscription in the light of the drawing, the lyre-player may well provide the additional information needed to establish the drawing’s *Sitz im Leben*.

³⁸ Cf. Emerton, p. 10: “... it would be strange for a description of a drawing of three figures to mention only two of them ...” But this statement seems to overlook the fact that the inscription is written above the two figures only, with the lyre-player in the far background of this quasi-perspective drawing.

The musical accompaniment represented by the female lyre player in the background suggests that the ambulating divine couple are not engaged merely in a leisurely stroll in the park. That a cultic context is involved is made probable, *inter alia*, by the numerous references to musical accompaniment in general, and lyre playing (*kinnôr*) in particular, in the biblical psalms (cf. also Amos v 23). In the cultus of ancient Israel, music served as a form of worship and adulation as well as a means of dramatization. As S. Mowinkel and others have shown, the biblical psalms often reflect the ritual enactment of mythical scenarios, especially that of “divine enthronement”. The hypothesis of “divine enthronement”, we submit, provides a very suitable explanation of the scene in question, viz., the procession of YHWH—and consort—towards the dais of their respective thrones, where they will be formally, and triumphantly, acclaimed “king-and-queen”. This assumption will also explain the unmistakable crown on the consort’s head, and the likely bull-horned stylized crown which serves as YHWH’s head-dress.

A scene such as this (naturally without the consort) probably underlies the rhapsodic description of the poet in Ps. xlvii 6-9:

God has ascended (his throne) midst trumpeting,
YHWH (has ascended) to the sound of the horn;
For (YHWH) is (now) king <over> all the earth...,
God is seated on his holy throne.

The actual enthronement takes place amidst loudly trumpeting horns; the preceding processional, one may assume, was accompanied by the “soft” music of lyre, harp (*nebel*), and flute (*‘ûgāb*). This sequence is reflected in Ps. xcvi 5-6:

Sing unto YHWH with the lyre,
With the lyre and the sound of song;
With the trumpets and the sound of the horn,
Play loudly before the king, YHWH.

The trumpets and (ram-)horns are “loud” (*ṛ(w)ʿ*), unmelodious instruments suited for “climactic” action. The lyre, harp, and flute are instruments which “sing” (*zmr*); they are suited for the leisurely walking rhythms of the king (and queen) in festive procession.

What is seemingly depicted here on the (fragmentary) ‘Ajrud Pithos (A) is part of this musical ensemble of lyre, harp and flute

which provides the musical accompaniment for the divine couple in the Feast of Enthronement.

III. Is (DN) Athirat to be identified with (DN) Q(u)dš(u)?

R. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-palästinensische Gottheiten in Ägypten* (Leiden, 1967), pp. 110ff., has queried (p. 112):

“Wie kommt es ... daß wir aus Vorderasien offenbar keinen inschriftlichen Hinweis auf die Göttin Qdš haben?”

and promptly replied (p. 113):

“[Es] erübrigt sich jeder Versuch, Qudšu mit einer vorderasiatischen Göttin zu identifizieren. Auch die Tonfigürchen³⁹ und die Darstellungen auf den Goldplaketten [aus Ugarit⁴⁰] lassen sich als Abbilder der vorderasiatischen Fruchtbarkeitsgöttin erklären, ohne daß dabei an ein und dieselbe Göttin gedacht werden muß.”

Stadelmann has overlooked a passage from the Ugaritic epic of Krt where *qdš* is necessarily an allusion to the goddess Athirat (as *ltpn* is to El). An incredulous son asks his mortally-ill father (*KTU* 1.16 [*CTA* 16]: I: 20ff.):

ik. yrgm. bn il. krt // šph. ltpn. wqdš

“How can one say that Krt is a god (lit., ‘son-of-El’),
The scion of LTPN and QDŠ?”

Nor can one exclude the possibility that the phrase *bn qdš* in, for example, *KTU* 1.2 (*CTA* 2): III: 19-20 also denotes (if only as part of a *double-entendre*) “sons of Qdš-Athirat” rather than merely “holy-ones” (lit., “sons-of-holiness”). Cf.

KTU 1.2 (*CTA* 2): III: 19-20: *in. bt[. l]y[. km] ilm // whzr[. kbn. qd]š*

versus

KTU 1.4 (*CTA* 4): IV: 50: *wn. in. bt. lb^l. km. ilm // whzr. kbn. a^lrt*

Even the Egyptian evidence is amenable to the identification of *Q(u)dš(u)* with Athirat. In a relief published by I. E. S. Edwards, *JNES* 14 (1956), p. 49, and discussed by Stadelmann (pp. 112-13)

³⁹ Cf. J. B. Pritchard, *Palestine Figurines in Relation to Certain Goddesses Known through Literature* (New Haven, Conn., 1943).

⁴⁰ Cf. *ANEP*, no. 465, now also Hestrin (n. 37).

we find the inscription *qdš-^cnt-^cštrt*. Since the two latter are the names of goddesses well-known from Ugaritic literature, it is not improbable that *qdš* completes the Canaanite triad of Athirat-Anat-Astarte (Ugaritic *atr*-^cnt-^cštrt).⁴¹

Does the proper-name *Ersatz* “Qudšu” support or strengthen the hypothesis that the name “Athirat” derives from a common-noun ²*tr* meaning “shrine, sanctuary”? The answer is assuredly in the negative. Even if we assume that the word *qdš* in the famous Krt passage (... *lqdš. atrt. šrm* ... *KTU* 1.14[*CTA* 14]: IV: 34-5) means “shrine, sanctuary” rather than the abstract “holiness”, this meaning is clearly determined by the context rather than by the etymology. The same nominal usage of *qdš* in Aqht (*KTU* 1.17[*CTA* 17]: I-II) means “holy place = cemetery”, rather than “holy place = place of worship; shrine”. The same is true of *atr* “place” (which occurs together with *qdš* in the above Aqht texts): only a suitably defined context can give *atr* the meaning “shrine, sanctuary”, a meaning which would not be self-evident in its adoption as the personal name of a goddess.⁴²

IV. Hosea xiv 9

Several scholars, notably M. Weinfeld, have been reminded by the K. ‘Ajrud and Kh. el-Qôm inscriptions of J. Wellhausen’s ingenious, if hitherto generally unconvincing, emendation of Hos. xiv 9b.⁴³ Instead of the MT’s obviously disturbed ²*ny. ‘nyty*.

⁴¹ Cf. already Albright in Edwards, p. 51, n. 20; Cross (n. 5), p. 33 (following Albright [n. 5], p. 106). Contrast U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (Fribourg and Göttingen, 1983), pp. 110-14. The triad of Q(u)dš(u)-Astarte-Anat recurs in a hieroglyphic inscription from the reign of Horemheb (ca. 1350 B.C.E.) published by D. B. Redford in *BASOR* 211 (1973), pp. 36-49. In this inscription both Q(u)dš(u) and Astarte are described as celestial deities, with Q(u)dš(u) designated “lady of the stars”. Cp Hebrew (Isa. xiv 13) *kôkêbê-šêl* and the Ugaritic myth of Šlm-w-Šhr (*KTU* 1.23 = *CTA* 23), with their implication that El (presumably with the aid of Athirat) has fathered the stars (= *bn ilm*). Cf. also Ps. xix 2a.

⁴² Cf. e.g., the Phoenician inscription from Pyrgi (J. A. Fitzmyer, *JAOS* 86 [1966], pp. 285-97), lines 1-2: *lrbt. l’štrt. šr. qdš. ʔz. ...* “To the Lady, Astarte (is dedicated) this shrine (lit., ‘holy place’)”. If Phoenician (ca. 500 B.C.E.) ²*šr* meant self-evidently “shrine”, then the qualifying *qdš* is clearly redundant. The same holds true for Old Aramaic (Sefiré) *b’šrh* (lit.) “in his place”, and *mutatis mutandis*, for the aforementioned Q(u)dš(u) which (e.g.) W. Helck, *Oriens Antiquus* 5 (1966), p. 8, renders by “heiliges Ding”, not “heiliges Ort”.

⁴³ Cf. *Die Kleinen Propheten* (Berlin, 1963), p. 134. The suggestion was made with reservation (“möglicher Weise”).

wʾšwrn(n)w, Wellhausen proposed *ʾny. *ʿntw. wʾšrtw* “I am his Anat and his Asherah”, i.e., YHWH fulfills the rôle of female deity represented by the goddesses, the one a belligerent goddess of war, the other a maternal goddess of love and fertility (cf. Athena-Aphrodite).

The problem with this daring emendation is that one does not expect to find an allusion to the goddess Anat in an 8th-century Hebrew (or for that matter, Phoenician) text. By this period, the goddess Anat has faded from her prominence in Late Bronze Age Canaanite literature (as reflected at Ugarit) into (well-deserved) oblivion, as indicated by, for example, a dearth of appearance in theophoric names and votive inscriptions of the Iron Age. Her successor is the much less violent Astarte (Hebrew *ʿāštōret*) who appears as a minor figure, and occasional doublet of Anat,⁴⁴ in some of the (presumably later) mythological traditions of Ugarit.⁴⁵

The solution, we believe, will be found in repointing Wellhausen’s **ʿntw* as **ʿ(w)ntw*, deriving from either *ʿnh* “respond (sexually)” (cf. Hos. ii 17) or **ʿnt* “time, season”, whence “(animal-)heat” (cf. Ex. xxi 10; Jer. ii 24, and *BHS* note *d* ad loc.). This emendation receives support from our interpretation of *asherah* as denoting (etymologically) “wife, consort”, here perhaps more precisely rendered as “mate” or “partner”, but also alluding to the cultic symbol of (the divine name) *Asherah*, viz., the tree (Deut. xvi 21; Judg. vi 25ff.).

The thrust of the passage, as noted (and generally acknowledged), is that YHWH provides Israel with all its fertility needs, male and female. This explains the conclusion of the verse “from me <his> fruit ...”; the word “fruit” refers at once to that of the tree—to which YHWH is explicitly compared in the line immediately preceding, in language recalling *ʿš. rʿnn*, itself a periphrastic allusion to (the divine name) *Asherah*, as often observed—and to that of the womb. Indeed, it is the semantic common ground provided by the term “fruit” (Heb. *perî*) which may well underlie the choice of the tree as fertility symbol for the god-

⁴⁴ Cf. especially the (fragmentary) 1.92 (= *UT* 2001) in comparison with 1.96 and our study of *KTU* 1.92 in *Aula Orientalis* 7 (1989), pp. 67-80.

⁴⁵ Cf. e.g., *KTU* 1.114 (= RS 24.258) and our study in *Maarav* 2 (1979-80), pp. 65-120. That Astarte is a relative newcomer to the Canaanite pantheon can be determined from her absence in the Middle Bronze Age Egyptian Execration texts.

dess. Cf. similarly *zera*^c “seed, sperm” (cf. Hos. iv 12 and n. 27, above).

This interpretation can be further supported by considering the poet’s choice of “Ephraim” as a designation of North Israel, more commonly referred to as the “House of (proper name) Israel/Joseph” elsewhere in prophetic literature.⁴⁶ The choice appears to be motivated by the term’s phonetic association with *prym* “(twin-)bulls”, alluding at once to the two sites of the North Israelite bull-cut (disparagingly labelled “calf”) at Bethel and Dan, and to the apparently proverbial image of the “House of Joseph” as a bovine creature (Gen. xlix 22; Deut. xxxiii 17). The prophet seems to be playing on the bull-imagery and phonetic ring of “Ephraim” on the one hand, and the iconography of YHWH as *ʔabbîr yiśrāʔēl*—“Steer-of-Israel”—evidenced by the cult of Samaria and K. ʿAjrud, on the other.

But the prophet executes an extraordinary reversal of rôles here in xiv 9. To attract the attention, and affection, of the (wild) bull-Ephraim, the “Steer-of-Israel” is transformed into a “cow” (archaic Hebrew *prt* [Gen. xlix 22] in heat (*ʿnt*) ready to mate with the bull-Ephraim. This *tour de force* stands the marital metaphor of the book’s opening chapters on its head: Israel-as-husband, YHWH-as-wife (i.e. asherah).⁴⁷

All of which is intended to drive home the message that the cult of YHWH has no need for a female partner, an Asherah. YHWH

⁴⁶ Hosea uses the name “Ephraim” for “Israel” some 34 times; Amos not even once. Isa. i-xii has some 14 usages, mostly in late, non-Isaianic loci. Obadiah uses it once, Deutero-Zechariah twice. Jeremiah uses it five times, four of them in ch. xxxi. Note well the collocation with “seed” in vii 15, and with “calf” in xxxi 18 (echoing Hos. x 11).

⁴⁷ The following reading and rendering is accordingly suggested for Hos. xiv 9:

ʔeprayim mah-ll <ô> ʿôd lāʿāšabbîm

ʔānî ʿônātô waʔāšērā <t>ô

ʔānî kibrôš raʿānān

mimmennî piry <ô> nimšāʔ

“What need has (bovine) Ephraim of (bovine) idols?

I (YHWH) am his mate-in-heat;

I am like a luxuriant juniper,

From me *issues* <his> fruit.”

The usual signification of *mš*² “find, light upon” fits poorly here. Cf. already BDB, p. 594a, rendering “gain, secure”, with a cross-reference to Gen. xxvi 12. Cf. perhaps Ugaritic *mgy* “come to, arrive at” = Biblical Aramaic *mṯ*² “reach, attain”. The choice of term is probably to be explained on grounds of alliterative compatibility: ...*rʿNN/MMNy* ... *NMš*². For similar phenomena in Ugaritic literature, cf. *UF* 11 (1979), pp. 537-57; *JNSL* 8 (1980), pp. 57-80.

is an androgynous fertility deity providing both halves of the sexual act needed to ensure fertility and fruition. He is a unity of "Baal-and-Asherah", "husband-and-wife" in dialectical fusion, a theological hendiadys of law and love.⁴⁸

POSTSCRIPT

My friend and colleague at the Hochschule für Jüdische Studien in Heidelberg, the art-historian Professor Dr H. Künzl, has kindly communicated to me (8 February 1989) the following observations relating to the K. 'Ajrud drawing discussed above:

"Die Darstellung ist ein Beispiel für eine frühe primitive Malerei, die mit linearen Mitteln arbeitet, ohne Angabe der Dreidimensionalität des menschlichen Körpers. Es ist der erste Ansatz zu einem räumlichen Empfinden, nicht im klassischen Sinne einer ausgebildeten Perspektive, wohl aber in einer Vorstellung von vorne und hinten; es ist eine Quasi-Räumlichkeit mit sparsamen Mitteln.

"Für die Anordnung der beiden Gestalten gibt es grundsätzlich nur zwei Möglichkeiten: (1) Sie stehen nebeneinander (2) Sie stehen hintereinander.

"Nimmt man an, die beiden Personen stehen nebeneinander, dann hätten wir eine linke größere und eine rechte kleinere Person, deren Bedeutung im Vergleich zur linken geringer ist. Wollte der Künstler aber nur ausdrücken, daß die rechte Person weniger bedeutend und daher kleiner gezeichnet ist, stellt sich die Frage, warum beide Gestalten nicht auf der gleichen Grundlinie stehen, und vor allem: warum die Linie der Schultern so gezeichnet ist, daß die rechte höher ist. Dem Künstler ging es offenbar nicht nur darum, diese Gestalt kleiner als die linke zu zeichnen, sondern er wollte darlegen, daß sie hinter ihm steht.

"Die Künstler des 9. bzw. 8. Jahrhunderts, die solche Malereien herstellten, dachten im allgemeinen noch recht linear, und der Maler dieser primitiven Malerei hatte Schwierigkeiten mit Überschneidungen, weshalb er alle Linien durchzog. Doch die Tatsache der Überschneidungen zeigt, daß etwas vor und etwas dahinter ist. Sonst wären Überschneidungen nicht notwendig gewesen. Er hätte sie nebeneinander anordnen können, ohne daß sie sich berührten.

"Meines Erachtens ist es daher ganz eindeutig, daß die rechte Gestalt als hinter der linken gedacht und keineswegs neben ihr steht."

⁴⁸ For a similar conclusion, but without reference to the material in Hosea discussed above, cf. P. A. H. de Boer, *Fatherhood and Motherhood in Israelite and Judean Piety* (Leiden, 1974), p. 461.

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Raphael Patai

MATRONIT:
THE GODDESS
OF THE KABBALA

I

Ancient Near Eastern mythologies have much to say about a goddess who seems to have played a central role in religious ritual as well as popular consciousness. Her name varied from culture to culture—Inanna in Sumer, Ishtar in Akkad, Anath in Canaan—yet her character remained the same for centuries, even millenniums. The life domains in which she primarily manifested herself were love and war, and her personality exhibited everywhere the same three basic traits of virginity, promiscuity, and blood-thirstiness.

The oldest of them was Inanna, the great Sumerian goddess of love and war, the tutelary deity of Uruk (the biblical Erech), whose prominence in the Sumerian pantheon was well established by the third millennium B.C. That she was regarded a virgin is evident from the two epithets which accompany her name: In myths and other texts she is most frequently called “the maid Inanna” and “the pure Inanna.” Yet throughout Sumerian history she was the goddess primarily responsible for sexual love, procreation, and fertility, who freely gave herself to Dumuzi (Tammuz), the earliest mythological ruler of Sumer, and thereafter became the wife of all Sumerian kings. Nor was she immune to the

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advances of ordinary mortals: An old Sumerian story tells of a gardener who one night managed to take advantage of Inanna's utter weariness and had intercourse with her. Upon awaking in the morning, Inanna was enraged over the indignity, and the vengeance she wrought seems to us to have surpassed all reason. But her behavior was in keeping with her character, for she was a goddess of bitter wrath and ruthless destruction, "the lady of battle and conflict," who had "great fury in her wrathful heart." It was she who intrusted King Hammurabi (*ca.* 1728–1686 B.C.) with mighty weapons, was his "gracious protecting genius," and, more than a thousand years later, in the days of Nabonidus (555–539 B.C.), was still worshiped at Uruk in a gold-clad cella, driving a chariot to which were harnessed seven lions.¹

The direct heir of Inanna in Mesopotamia was Ishtar, the great goddess of love and war in the Akkadian pantheon. The identity of the two is attested by the fact that in some Akkadian texts the two names are used interchangeably. In the Babylonian Ishtar, however, a certain shift occurred in the balance between the virginal and promiscuous poles of her character: Her virginal aspect was underplayed, while her promiscuity was emphasized to the extent of making her a divine harlot. In many texts Ishtar is spoken of as the "Cow of Sin," Sin being the moon-god; and in this capacity she ruled over the plants, watered them and made them grow. An incantation for childbirth tells of this "Cow of Sin" that she was impregnated by a "restless young bull," and had great difficulty in bearing her young, until two genii of heaven helped her. In her human form, her love easily turned to hate: she first loved, then destroyed, a long line of divine, human, and animal paramours, including a lion, a horse, a bird, a gardener, several shepherds, the hero Gilgamesh, Tammuz, etc. She also was the wife of human kings, such as Sargon of Agade. Her influence extended over all mankind and the entire animal kingdom: when she entered the Nether World, neither man nor beast copulated; when she emerged, all of them were again seized by sexual desire. But she was also the mother of the country, who said of herself, "It is I myself who gave birth to my people," and the mother of several gods among whom the fire-god was the firstborn. One of her titles was "sweet-voiced mistress of the gods." Yet she was also "the most awesome of the goddesses," "Ishtar of the battle-

¹ James Bennett Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1955), pp. 41, 44, 54, 55, 56, 57, 159, 178, 309 (hereafter *ANET*); Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 122, 140–41, 153, 161–62, 197, 205–6, 262.

field," clad in divine fire, carrying the *melammu*-headwear, who would rain fire on the enemies. It was she who gave victory to her lovers, the Babylonian kings, intrusting her mighty armed forces to them. Among all the arts of war she was especially interested in the chariot: In the early stages of her career she tried to win the love of Gilgamesh by promising him "a chariot of lapis and gold," and more than a millennium later, in the Ptolemaic period, she was still known as "mistress of horses, lady of the chariot." When not engaged in love or war she was sitting, awe-inspiringly, on her lion-throne.²

In the other heiress of Inanna, the Canaanite Anath, the balance between the love and the war aspects of the goddess was tipped in the opposite direction. Instead of being concerned primarily with finding ever new divine, human, and animal bedfellows, as Akkadian Ishtar was reputed to have been, Anath spent most of her energies in the battlefield. She too, to be sure, was a typical goddess of love, both virginal and promiscuous. Her character is aptly epitomized in a thirteenth-century B.C. Egyptian text in which she and Astarte are called "the goddesses who conceive but do not bear," meaning that they are perennially fruitful without ever losing their virginity. In the mythological texts unearthed at Ugarit (Ras Shamra) in the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean, and dating from the fifteenth to fourteenth century B.C., her constant epithet is "the maiden Anath" or "the virgin Anath." And, as late an author as Philo Byblius, who flourished in the early second century A.D., still refers to the virginity of Anath whom he identifies with Athena, the famous virgin goddess of the Greeks. Like Ishtar, Anath was called "lady of heaven, mistress of all the gods," and, again like Ishtar, she loved gods, men, and animals.

Her foremost lover was her brother Baal. When she approached, Baal dismissed his other wives, and she, in preparation for the union with him, bathed in sky-dew and rubbed herself with ambergris from a sperm whale. The actual intercourse between Anath and Baal is described with graphic explicitness which is unique even among the unrestrained accounts of love-making usual in ancient Near Eastern texts. In a place called Dubr, Baal lay seventy-seven times with a heifer who seems to have been none other than Anath herself, and it appears that the wild bull born to

² Stephen H. Langdon, *Semitic (The Mythology of All Races, Vol. V [Boston, 1931])*, pp. 25-28, 94, 97; and his *Babylonian Liturgies* (Paris, 1913), pp. 43, 95; *ANET*, pp. 83, 84, 94, 108, 111, 113, 118, 119, 123, 205, 250, 294, 298, 299, 384, 427, 449, 451.

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Baal was the issue of this union. A mortal lover of Anath was Aqhat whom, after what must have been an intimate tête-à-tête (description unfortunately missing), Anath addressed as "My darling great big he-man!" On the motherly side, Anath was said to have been one of the two wet nurses of the gods, to have given suck to a son of King Keret, and one of her applications was "Progenitress of the Peoples." In Egypt, Anath came to be regarded as the wife of the god Seth, and an Egyptian magical text from the thirteenth century B.C. describes in surprisingly sadistic terms how Seth deflowers Anath on the seashore.

Yet all these adventures in the fields of love pale to insignificance in relation to Anath's great exploits in war and strife. In fact, no ancient Near Eastern goddess was more bloodthirsty than she. She was easily provoked to violence, and, once she began to fight, she would go berserk, smiting and killing right and left. One sees her plunge into fighting with real pleasure: She smites the peoples of both East and West, so that their heads fly like sheaves and their hands like locusts. Not satisfied with this, she binds the severed heads to her back and the cut-off hands to her girdle and plunges knee-deep in the blood of troops, and hip-deep in the gore of heroes. Now she is in her element: Her liver swells with laughter, her heart fills up with joy.

It was this bloodthirsty and warlike Anath whose worship penetrated Egypt some time prior to the thirteenth century B.C. She was, for the Egyptians as well, "Anath, Lady of Heaven, Mistress of All the Gods," a war goddess, who was associated with horses and chariots and who, equipped with shield and spear, protected the Pharaoh. Indeed, because of her warlike nature, Anath in Egypt was called "the goddess, the victorious, a woman acting as a man, clad as a male and girt as a female."³

II

The same three traits, chastity, promiscuity, and bloodthirstiness, characterize the daughter-goddess who figures prominently in Kabbalistic literature and is referred to by a great variety of names of which two, the *Matronit* and the *Shekhina*, are standard designations.

According to Kabbalistic theory, the *Matronit* is but the lowest

³ Langdon, *op. cit.*, p. 31; *ANET*, pp. 15, 136, 137, 139, 140, 142, 146, 151-53, 249, 250, 254; Cyrus H. Gordon, in Samuel N. Kramer (ed.), *Mythologies of the Ancient World* (New York, 1961), pp. 187, 197-99; William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore, 1942), pp. 75, 85, 197.

of the ten *Sefirot*, the mystical aspects or emanations of the God-head which, to some extent, correspond to the gnostic *aeons*. Yet whatever the primary meaning and the origin of the Matronit as a theosophic concept, she has been built up in Kabbalistic literature, and especially in the late thirteenth-century book *Zohar*—the holiest scripture of Kabbalism—into a palpable individuum whose acts, words, and feelings only make sense if she is considered a true mythological deity. Whatever the intention of the authors of Kabbalistic treatises in creating or developing the female divine figure of the Matronit, one thing is certain: Among the Kabbalists there could have been very few who, while reading or hearing about her uninhibitedly described exploits, were nevertheless able to visualize all the time that she was nothing but an aspect of the manifest nature of the one and only Deity. For the masses of Kabbalists—and Kabbalism *was* a religious mass phenomenon among the Jews from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries—she undoubtedly assumed the character of a discrete divinity, in other words, she was taken as a goddess, separate and distinct from the male deity who, when contraposed to her, was referred to as the King, her husband. The *popular-mythical*, as against the *scholarly-mystical*, view of the Matronit had a marked resemblance to the popular Mariolatry of the Latin countries, where the Virgin is not the Jewish woman whose womb God chose to reincarnate himself in human form—as the official Catholic doctrine has it—but the Mother of God, herself a goddess, who performs miracles through the ages and to whom, therefore, direct and personal adoration is due. This, precisely, was the light in which the Matronit appeared to the uneducated or semi-educated Kabbalistic Jews: In contrast to the divine King who, following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, withdrew into the remote heights of heaven and made himself inaccessible, the Matronit remained down here on earth, continued to be directly concerned with the welfare of her people, and could be approached directly, any time, any place. She thus supplied the psychologically so important female divine figure in Judaism, a religion which had lacked this element for many centuries prior to the emergence of Kabbalism.

The relatively late reappearance of the goddess—I say reappearance because in biblical times down to the First Exile of 586 B.C., goddesses figured prominently in popular Hebrew religion—is in itself a remarkable feat of religious resurgence. Even more remarkable, however, is the reappearance in the figure of the Matronit of the three basic traits of chastity, promiscuity, and

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bloodthirstiness, which place her right alongside the great ancient Near Eastern love goddesses.

III

Little can be said about the first of the three cardinal features in the portrait of the divine Matronit. Virginity, after all, is a state shared by all human and divine females in an early stage of their life history. It becomes remarkable only if, after reaching full nubility, a woman prefers to remain a virgin and actually preserves her virginal state in an environment, whether earthly or Olympic, where the general atmosphere is one of intensive sexual activity or even promiscuity. It becomes more than remarkable, if the woman in question engages in such promiscuous sexual activity and yet at one and the same time retains her virginity. This is the paradoxical chastity of several ancient Near Eastern goddesses, and this is the trait shared with them by the Matronit.

The Virgin Mary, to whom reference has already been made earlier, also belongs to this category of female divinities, and her veneration can be adduced as an example which will facilitate our understanding of the paradoxical virginity of the Matronit. Mary bore Jesus to God, and several other sons and daughters to her earthly husband Joseph, yet she nevertheless remained "*The Virgin*" and is adored as such to this day. Similarly with the Matronit, who paradoxically retained her virginity while being the lover of gods and men. Her virginity is spoken of in both figurative expressions and direct statements. The biblical verse about the "red heifer, faultless, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke,"⁴ is applied to her and explained as meaning that the forces of evil could never overpower the Matronit, "neither Satan, nor the Destroyer, nor the Angel of Death," all of whom represent the forces of Hell.⁵ In contrast to the pagan goddesses who all are said to have succumbed to Satan, she, the Shekhina is a cup full of blessing of which nobody has as yet tasted, unimpaired,⁶ that is, virginal. No stranger is permitted to draw near her, he who tries to approach her suffers the penalty of death.⁷ In one aspect the Shekhina is identical with the Holy Land, and in this capacity she was never defiled or enjoyed by a stranger.⁸

⁴ Num. 19:2.

⁵ *Zohar* iii.180b, Raaya Mehemna.

⁶ *Zohar* iii.89b-90a, Raaya Mehemna.

⁷ *Zohar* iii.267a, Raaya Mehemna.

⁸ *Zohar* iii.189a.

IV

In sharp contrast and logical contradiction to this picture of the virgin Shekhina is the one which depicts her as being enjoyed, in addition to the divine King who was her lawfully wedded husband, also by Satan, other gods, heroes of biblical history, and many other men. Yet, and this again is a feature she has in common with ancient Near Eastern love goddesses, no blame is attached to her because of any of these sundry unions. A goddess behaves in accordance with her divine nature, and the human laws of sexual morality simply do not apply to her—this is the common attitude that finds expression in both the ancient Near Eastern and the Kabbalistic myths. As the father-god El says in an Ugaritic mythical poem, “there is no restraint among goddesses.”⁹

In the early mythical ages, we are informed in the *Zohar*, Jacob became the first husband of the Matronit. However, while Jacob was alive, the union was not consummated because, inveterate polygamist that he was, he continued to have marital relations with his two wives and two concubines even after the goddess attached herself to him. Therefore only after his death, when his spirit entered the Beyond, did Jacob couple with the Matronit.¹⁰

With her second husband things were different. This was none other than Moses, who, once she became his wife, separated himself from his earthly helpmeet, Zipporah. Having done this, he was allowed to achieve what Jacob never did: to copulate with the Matronit while still in the flesh.¹¹

We hear nothing of the Matronit from the death of Moses—when she took him on her wings and carried him from Mount Nebo to his unknown burial place four miles away¹²—to the time when the Temple was built in Jerusalem. As Solomon labored on the construction of the sanctuary, the Matronit made her own preparations for her union with her divine husband, the King: She prepared a house for him in which he could take up joint residence with her, and which, in a mystical way, was identical with the Jerusalem temple itself. When the great day arrived, her father and her mother adorned her so that her bridegroom should become desirous of her.¹³

The King and the Matronit were not only brother and sister but

⁹ Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

¹⁰ *Zohar* i.21b–22a.

¹¹ *Zohar* i.21b–22a.

¹² B. Sota 13b; Sifre Deut. 355.

¹³ *Zohar* i.49a, iii.74b.

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twins; in fact, Siamese twins, who emerged from the womb of the supernal mother in the androgynous shape of a male and a female body attached to each other back to back. Soon, however, the King removed his sister from his back, and she, after a futile attempt to reunite with him in the same position, resigned herself to the separation and to facing the King across a distance.¹⁴

By human standards a marriage between brother and sister would have been incestuous; not so in the heavenly realm: There, no incest prohibitions exist, and thus it was completely proper and licit for the King and the Matronit to marry.¹⁵

The wedding, a veritable *hieros gamos*, was celebrated with due pomp and circumstance. The Matronit, surrounded by her maidens, repaired to her couch set up in the Temple, there to await the coming of the groom. The curtains round about were decorated with myriads of precious stones and pearls. At midnight, the tinkling of bells he wore around his ankles announced the coming of the King. As he approached, he was accompanied by a host of divine youths, and the maidens of the Matronit welcomed him and them by beating their wings with joy. The pleasure of the King and the Matronit in each other was indescribable. After singing a song of praise to the King, the Matronit's maidens withdrew, and so did the youths who accompanied him. Alone, the King and the Matronit embraced and kissed, and then he led her to the couch. He placed his left arm under her head, his right arm embraced her, and he let her enjoy his strength. They lay in tight embrace, she impressing her image into his body like a seal that leaves its imprint upon a page of writing, he playing betwixt her breasts and vowing in his great love that he would never forsake her.¹⁶

Some say that as long as the Temple stood the King would come down from his heavenly abode every midnight, seek out his wife, the Matronit, and enjoy her in their Temple bedchamber. The sacred marriage thus became a daily, or better, midnightly, ritual, performed not by the human representatives of the god and the goddess who usually figured in the ancient Near Eastern New Year rituals, but by the two deities themselves. This divine union had unsurpassed cosmic significance: On it depended the well-being of the whole world.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Zohar* i.30b-31a.

¹⁵ *Tiqqune Hazohar*, *Tiqqun* 34, p. 77; quoted after Tishbi, *Mishnat Hazohar*, ii.623.

¹⁶ *Zohar Hadash*, *Midrash Haneelam to Ekhah* (Warsaw, n.d.), p. 183.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Others say that the King and the Matronit coupled only once a week, on the night between Friday and Saturday. In true mythical fashion, this weekly divine union served as the prototype, in other words, as the mythical validation, of the traditionally practiced weekly union between husbands and wives.¹⁸ In the Kabbalistic view, when the learned men, familiar with the heavenly mysteries, couple with their wives on Friday nights, they do this in full cognizance of performing a most significant act in direct imitation of the union which takes place at that very time between the supernal couple. If the wife conceives at that hour, the earthly father and mother of the child can be sure that it will receive a soul from the above, one of those pure souls which are procreated in the divine copulation of the King and the Matronit.¹⁹

But even more than that. When a pious earthly couple performs the act, by doing so they set in motion all the generative forces of the mythico-mystical universe. The human sexual act causes the King to emit his seminal fluid from his divine male genital, and thus to fertilize the Matronit who thereupon gives birth to human souls and to angels.²⁰ The passage in the *Zohar* in which this particular thought (or mythologem) is expressed is so replete with symbolic expressions calculated to obscure its true meaning that one gains the impression of purposeful avoidance of clarity in order not to offend sensibilities. The King's seminal fluid is referred to as a "river"; the Shekhina or Matronit as "the Sea" or "Living Creature"; the King's male genital is called "the sign of the covenant," etc. Yet the meaning of the whole passage is nevertheless clear: it speaks of the sexual union between the King and the Matronit and the resultant procreation by them of souls and angels.

Yet another version, still preoccupied with the times of divine copulation, speaks not of a weekly, but of an annual cycle. Every year, we are told, the people of Israel sin with tragic inevitability, which enables Samael, the Satan (or Azazel), to bend the Matronit to his will. Samael, in the form of a serpent, or riding a serpent, lurks at all times near the privy parts of the Matronit, in the hope of being able to penetrate her. Whether or not he succeeds in thus gratifying his desire depends on the behavior of Israel. As long as Israel remains virtuous, Samael's lustful design is frustrated. But as soon as Israel sins, as they, alas, are bound to do year after

¹⁸ *Zohar* iii.296a.

¹⁹ *Zohar* ii.89a-b.

²⁰ *Zohar* i.12b.

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year, their sins add to Samael's power, he glues himself to her body "with the adhesive force of resin," and defiles her.²¹

Once this happens, the Matronit's husband, the King, departs from her and withdraws into the solitude of his heavenly abode. This unhappy state of affairs continues until, on the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat, which is destined to Azazel,²² is hurled to its death down a cliff in the Judaeen Desert. Samael, attracted by the animal offered to him, lets go of the Matronit who thereupon can ascend to heaven and reunite with her husband, the King.²³

A new chapter in the life of the Matronit opened when her bed-chamber, the Temple of Jerusalem, was destroyed. Since her husband, the King, was wont to copulate with her only in the temple, its destruction meant the sudden disruption of the theretofore intensely pursued love relationship between the two.²⁴ This event was a stark tragedy for the divine lovers. The Matronit was banished from her holy abode and from the Land of Israel, the King lamented over his great loss, and the sun and the moon and all that is above and below mourned and cried with him.²⁵ The separation of the King and the Matronit denuded them of each other and both remained in a state of "shameful nakedness."²⁶ Moreover, since it is a cardinal principle of the physical as well as the metaphysical universe that "blessings are found only where male and female are together," the King, when he thus became deprived of his Matronit, lost stature and power, was no longer King, nor great, nor potent.²⁷

When, in true male fashion, the King was no longer able to endure the misery of solitude, he let a slave goddess take the place of his true queen, one of the handmaidens of the Matronit who used to "sit behind the hand-mill." This slave concubine now assumed the rule over the Holy Land, just as the Matronit had ruled over it in former times. This act, more than anything else, caused the King to lose his honor.²⁸

As to the Matronit, her misery consisted not only in losing her husband and being banished from her palace and land, but also in resigning herself to being violated in her exile by other gods. And although these unions were involuntary on her part, once the other gods were able to take possession of her, she became tied to them, and the children of those other gods, the gentiles, were able

²¹ *Zohar* ii.219b, i.64a.

²² Lev. 16:8-10.

²³ *Zohar* iii.79a, i.64a.

²⁴ *Zohar* iii.42a-b.

²⁵ *Zohar* i.210a-b.

²⁶ *Zohar* iii.17a-b, 74b

²⁷ *Zohar* iii.69a.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

to suck from her just as the Children of Israel had done while the Temple still stood.²⁹

Yet whether at home or in exile, the Matronit is irresistibly attracted to the pious men of Israel and especially when they are engaged in either of the two most meritorious pursuits: the study of the Law and the performance of good deeds. Men of such caliber make it a rule to sleep with their wives only on Friday night; throughout the six days of the week they live as if they had been castrated and devote themselves to their holy works. But, in doing so, do they not run the risk of unblessedness, since "blessings are found only where male and female are together"? No; because whenever these men are away from their wives, the Shekhina couples with them. Likewise, when such sages keep away from their wives because of the latter's menstrual impurity, or when they are on a voyage, the Shekhina joins them: Never are they deprived of the blessed state of male and female togetherness.³⁰

V

The third characteristic of the virginal and wanton love goddesses of the ancient Near Eastern religions, as we shall recall, is their bloodthirstiness. In the old mythological texts the maiden goddess of sexual love is often described as possessed of the most appalling cruelty. The close to three millennia which had elapsed between those myths and the period in which the Matronit of the Kabbala flourished, have, of course, left their mark. In the medieval sources, the warlike traits of the Matronit are drawn with greater restraint. Yet the archaic feature of bloodthirstiness is clearly recognizable in the Kabbalistic references to the Matronit as the chieftain of the divine armies and the leader of the supernal forces against the opposing human and infernal powers of evil.

It would be futile at this stage to search for connecting links between the bloodthirsty goddesses of the third and second millennia B.C. and the warlike Matronit of the thirteenth century A.D. The idea of a warlike deity was, of course, nothing strange to biblical Hebrew faith, but, in keeping with the officially embraced monotheism, all supernatural belligerence was attributed to Yahweh, who therefore is referred to as a "man of war,"³¹ a slayer of dragons,³² and a victor over human enemies whose life-blood

²⁹ *Zohar* i.84b.

³⁰ *Zohar* i.49b-50a, 66b; Moses Cordovero (1522-70), *Pardes Rimmonim*, Gate 16, section 6.

³¹ Exodus 15:3.

³² Isa. 51:9; Ps. 89:11; etc.

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crimsons his garments.³³ In talmudic times (first to fifth centuries A.D.), although the chastised and subjugated Judaism of the Roman and Byzantine eras had long ceased to think of God as a warrior, a late and faint echo of the ancient pagan goddesses of destruction can perhaps be heard in one of the traits attributed to the Shekhina, the personified Presence of God, imagined as a female entity. She was said to take the souls of exceptionally meritorious individuals who were to be spared the bitterness of being mowed down by the Angel of Death.³⁴ The remarkable thing in this idea is not the combination of compassion and the snuffing out of human life, but that this function of mercy killing was assigned to the female Shekhina. It was, however, only in the Kabbala that the Shekhina, now conceived as a truly mythical female deity, assumed a character reminiscent of the ancient Near Eastern bloodthirsty goddesses.

In the Zohar it is the Shekhina-Matronit to whom the King intrusts all his warlike activities: when he wishes to take revenge on the idolatrous nations, the Forces of Evil awaken, and the Shekhina becomes filled with blood and metes out bloody punishment to the sinners.³⁵ In her wars against the pagans the Matronit commands myriads of supernatural soldiers falling into many categories, such as "lords of supernal faces," "lords of eyes," "lords of weapons," "lords of lamentations," "lords of trembling," and other armed warriors with six faces and six wings, all of whom gird terrible swords, whose clothes are blazing fire, and whose flaming scimitars fly all over the world. This was the army which the Matronit led against the Egyptians in the days of the Exodus.³⁶

In fact, the King completely renounced all direct control of his forces and placed them under the command of the Matronit. He intrusted to her all his weapons, spears, scimitars, bows, arrows, swords, catapults, as well as all his fortifications, wood, stones, and subordinated all his war lords to her, saying: "From now on, all my wars shall be intrusted to your hands." In keeping with this mandate, when the Great Overlord of the Egyptians, who was none other than Samael, leading his six hundred chariots manned by angry warriors (or "accusers," because this battle was, of course, a spiritual rather than a physical contest), charged the

³³ Isa. 63:1-6.

³⁴ B. Baba Bathra 17a; B. Sota 13b; Sifre Deut. §355; cf. Deut. Rabba, 11.10 end; Cant. Rab. 1 and 3.

³⁵ *Zohar* ii.29a.

³⁶ *Zohar* ii.50b.

fleeing Israelites, it was the Matronit who led the defense and drove the attackers into the sea. Several generations later, when Sisera attacked the Children of Israel, it was again the Matronit into whose hands the enemy's chariots were delivered and who uprooted them from the world.³⁷

VI

These are a few of the traits which make up the three aspects of the Matronit, and the three aspects themselves, her chastity, her promiscuity, and her warlikeness (or bloodthirstiness) are, if not the totality, the most important components of her personality. The fact that precisely the same three aspects characterize also the ancient Near Eastern love goddesses, and that their traces can be rediscovered in the Virgin Mary, makes us pause. Whence, we feel compelled to ask ourselves, this resemblance, this persistence of the paradoxical goddess figure in ostensibly and avowedly monotheistic religions? In trying to answer, the alternative of diffusion versus independent invention immediately offers itself. The *possibility* of diffusion is, of course, present: The prototype was the Sumerian Inanna whose features can be clearly recognized in the Babylonian Ishtar and the Canaanite Anath. Hebrew monotheism may have been unable to exorcize the tenacious goddess, and it is not at all impossible that, even if she slumbered for several centuries, she awoke and reclaimed some of her old dues in the figure of Mary in Christianity, and in that of the Shekhina in talmudic and Kabbalistic Judaism. Yes, not at all impossible; but how can one prove it short of the most elaborate research? And if a connection were proven, what would be gained thereby? There still would remain the question of why *this* goddess precisely achieved such a fabulous secondary career, of all the others just as readily available in the rich ancient Near Eastern pantheons. To answer this, we have to shift from comparative mythology to psychology, and, once we do this, the question of diffusion versus independent invention becomes irrelevant. For whether or not the Matronit (and Mary) goes ultimately back to Inanna, her coming to life in new and very greatly changed religious environments shows that she met a psychological need which was as much a burning and driving issue in medieval Ashkenazi or Sephardi Jewry as it had been in third millennium B.C. Sumer. How can this psychological need be made tangible?

³⁷ *Zohar* ii.51a-b.

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In trying to answer this question we shall, of necessity, concentrate on the Matronit-Shekhina, the medieval Kabbalistic goddess figure, with whom this study deals. If we want to consider what the Matronit-Shekhina meant psychologically, we must view her entire mythical character and not be satisfied with the three traits discussed above, however predominant they may be within the total picture. In attempting to do this we shall soon find that, in addition to the three basic or primary features of chastity, promiscuity, and bloodthirstiness, the Matronit-Shekhina has a fourth character trait which, while secondary, is nevertheless of considerable psychological import. This fourth feature is that of motherliness, which, as we saw above, figured to some extent in the personality of the ancient Near Eastern love and war goddesses. In Kabbalistic mythology this trait originally belonged to the mother goddess, the progenitress of both the Son-King and the Daughter-Shekhina,³⁸ but it was transferred to the daughter, as a few examples will show.

The Shekhina is the (spiritual) mother of Israel and as such she is the embodiment of the "Community of Israel" (the Hebrew term for which has the feminine gender). She suckles Israel, thereby providing all the Children of Israel not only with nourishment but also with complete well-being. She is, in fact, called the "Lower Mother" in relation to her people, and in contradistinction from her own mother who is the "Supernal" or "Higher" Mother. She cannot deny her motherly nature even in relation to the gentiles, and, after her exile from Jerusalem, when the "other gods," that is, the deities of the pagans, had their will on her, she gave suck to the gentile peoples just as she had wetnursed Israel.³⁹

Thus the Matronit-Shekhina appears as the mythologically objectified projection of the all-round woman, the woman who takes on all the shapes, aspects, and appearances of the human female needed by the male of the species not only for biological survival but equally for his psychological existence. The character of this need, which accompanies him from birth to death, from cradle to grave, changes as he lives out his allotted span. No sooner is he born of her, when he wants to be clasped to her ample, motherly breast and given suck by her. As he grows he needs her protection and direction. As soon as he becomes aware of woman as the opposite sex, he must have her shine on his

³⁸ The various persons or components of the deity in Kabbalistic theosophy will be dealt with in the author's forthcoming book, *The Hebrew Goddess*.

³⁹ *Zohar* i.84b, iii.17a-b, 186b.

emotional horizon in virginal purity. When he has to struggle with enemies, or is beset by adversity, he relies, in fact or in fancy, on her to fight the forces of evil that oppose him. When he feels his blood boil with frustrated aggression, he imagines her as the furious female who can do for him what he himself cannot do and mercilessly plunges into attack. In the routine of regulated marital sexuality, she imparts metaphysical and even cosmic significance to the act. When home life becomes monotonous and stale, she is there with the thousand painted faces of her allure and the ever present promise of her availability. And when the ultimate exhaustion overcomes him, it is the hope of her last kiss which makes him forget the bitterness of death and instead think of dying as the beginning of a new life in a happy Beyond.

The Matronit is the projection of all and everything a woman can be in order to sustain man. She symbolizes in her manifold aspects the great affirmation of life, the basic satisfactions one derives from existence, the comforts one finds in mother, nursemaid, lover, bride, wife, wanton seductress, warrior-protectress, and opener of the gates of the Beyond.

The image of the Matronit does not lack its contradictory features which betray something of the male's ambivalence in his relationship to woman. The Matronit, in common with the ancient great love goddesses, is both virgin and wanton. Virgin, because man must idealize woman; he wants *his* woman to be virginal, to have waited for him through countless aeons, and to remain virginal and chaste even while yielding to his embrace, and to his alone. Wanton, because at the same time, he imagines the woman whose body holds the promise of lust for him as the embodiment of desirability, much loved by men and gods, who not merely yields to him but arouses him and makes him follow her into and through the labyrinthine mysteries of love. And paradoxically, but with a deep inner inevitability, he imagines his virgin bride and wanton woman to be one and the same person, and projects both self-contradictory characters into one and the same goddess.

As if this were not enough, the conflated image of the virgin-wanton, in turn, appears as merely one of the two over-all aspects united in the goddess: the love aspect, as against which she has another aspect, a cruel and frightening one, that of the pitiless warrior-goddess, who sheds blood, extinguishes life, and enjoys doing this as much as she does making love. And, what is equally paradoxical, man feels himself attracted by the frowning countenance of this goddess of battle and wrath as much as to the

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virgin-wanton who beckons to him with her chaste-experienced smile.

The goddess thus speaks to man with three tongues: Keep away from me because I am a virgin; enjoy me because I am available to all; die in me because I thirst for your blood. Whichever of her aspects gains momentarily the upper hand, there is a deep chord in the male psyche which powerfully responds to it. Her voices enter man and stir him: they bend man to pay homage to her, and they lure man to lose himself in her whether in love or in death.



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The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality

STEPHEN D. MOORE

I. BEAUTIFUL BRIDES

The arduous task of queering the Song of Songs,¹ a book that is ostensibly an unequivocal celebration of male-female sexual love, was

This project has benefited from the encouragement and advice of various friends and colleagues, notably Fiona Black, Virginia Burrus, and Cheryl Exum. The critical input of Elizabeth Clark, Carrie Schroeder, and an anonymous reviewer for *Church History* is also gratefully acknowledged. All remaining errors and excesses are, of course, my own.

1. "Queering" is what "queer theory" is said to do. Familiarity with queer theory is not necessary in order to follow the argument of this article, though a note on queer theory is probably in order. The term designates a huge and heterogeneous body of work on sex and sexuality that emerged from the field(s) of literary studies during the 1990s. This work tends overwhelmingly to be social constructionist in thrust, arguing (or simply assuming) that neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality are transhistorical essences, but are historical formations of relatively recent vintage instead. Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), which argues that homosexuality was a product of late-nineteenth-century medical discourse, has been a crucial catalyst in the emergence of queer theory (most of which is not theory, however, despite the name, but rather literary and cultural criticism). Along with a deconstruction of essentialized sexuality, queer theory is also commonly associated with a deconstruction of essentialized gender. Queer critics tend to affirm, with Judith Butler, that gender identity is purely performative, the product of a compulsory set of social rituals and conventions, which conspire to engender retroactively the illusion that masculinity and femininity are natural and innate, merely "expressed" by the actions, gestures, and speech that in fact produce them (see especially Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Thinking Gender [New York: Routledge, 1990]). Such arguments have profound political stakes, striking as they do at the gender conformity and sexual conformity that are the twin pillars of most contemporary cultures. So long as heterosexuality, in particular, is assumed to be natural, neutral, universal, or God-given, it remains the ultimate ideological formation ("compulsory heterosexuality" or "heteronormativity," as it is frequently labeled). The present article contrasts Christian interpretations of the Song of Songs before and after the "invention" of heterosexuality. Further on queer theory, see Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?" *PMLA* 110 (1995): 343–49; and Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities, differences* 3 (1991). For liaisons between queer theory and religious studies, see Gary David Comstock and Susan E. Henking, eds., *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Continuum, 1997); Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, *Contraversions: Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture, and Society* 8 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Mark D. Jordan, *The*

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accomplished over many centuries by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church (as well as by Jewish Sages of blessed memory, though they were hampered by a modesty and restraint to which their Christian cousins were seldom subject). Night after night in their cells, by flickering candlelight, they queeried the Song of Solomon, strenuously inquiring after its spiritual meaning and confidently setting it forth. And as they did so their austere cells were transformed into lavish theaters. What follows is a series of preliminary portraits of some of the more remarkable performers.

We begin with Origen of Alexandria, whose commentary and homilies on the Song of Songs set the stage for so much that would follow, Origen himself taking the stage to rapturous applause in his celebrated role as the Bride. Here is a short snippet from his performance:

For there is a certain spiritual embrace, and O that the Bridegroom's more perfect embrace may enfold my Bride! Then I too shall be able to say what is written in this same book: *His left hand is under my head, and His right hand will embrace me* [Song 2:6]. . . . And if He will condescend to make my soul His Bride too and come to her, how fair must she then be to draw Him down from heaven to herself, to cause Him to come down to earth, so that He may visit His beloved one! With what beauty must she be adorned, with what love must she burn that He may say to her the things which He said to the perfect Bride, about *thy neck, thine eyes, thy cheeks, thy hands, thy shoulders, thy feet!* God permitting, we will think about these questions, and consider why the Bride's members are thus differentiated and a special meed of praise accorded to each part; thus, when we have thought it out, we may try to have our own soul spoken to in the same way.²

Christendom had to wait almost a thousand years for an artiste able to match Origen's performance. Actually, Bernard of Clairvaux not only matched it, he outdid Origen in effusiveness. Listen to Bernard as he warms up: "Of what use to me the wordy effusions of the prophets? Rather let him who is the most handsome of the sons of men, let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth [cf. Song 1:1]. . . . Even the very beauty of the angels can only leave me wearied. For my Jesus utterly surpasses these in his majesty and splendor. Therefore I ask of him what I ask of neither man nor angel: that he kiss me with the kiss of his

Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology, Sexuality, History, and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); and especially Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998).

2. Origen, *Homilies on the Song of Songs* 1.2–3. The translation of the *Homilies* and the *Commentary* used throughout is that of R. P. Lawson, *Origen, The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation 26 (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1957).

mouth."³ Now listen to this declaration of passion: "It is simply that I am in love. . . . It is desire that drives me on, not reason. . . . I ask, I crave, I implore: let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth."⁴ And for a gender-bending finale: "While the bride is conversing about the Bridegroom, he, as I have said, suddenly appears, yields to her desire by giving her a kiss. . . . The filling up of her breasts is a proof of this. For so great is the potency of that holy kiss, that no sooner has the bride received it than she conceives and her breasts grow rounded with the fruitfulness of conception, bearing witness, as it were, with this milky abundance. Men with an urge to frequent prayer will have experience of what I say. Often enough when we approach the altar to pray our hearts are dry and lukewarm. But if we persevere, there comes an unexpected infusion of grace, our breast expands, as it were, and our interior is filled with an overflowing love; and if somebody should press upon it then, this milk of sweet fecundity would gush forth in streaming richness."⁵

But even Bernard would be hard-pressed to hold his hard-won place as Christendom's most extravagant interpreter of the celebrated role of the Bride in the face of the stiff competition that was to follow—Denis the Carthusian, for example, known, not for nothing, as the Ecstatic Doctor. Denis was the first expositor to actually sing the role, and in a shrill soprano, accompanied by startling contortions of face and body (at one point even falling off the stage).⁶ But divas such as Denis would soon be exposed as hopeless hams by the elegant interpretation of the role of the Bride performed by the Mystical Doctor, St John of the

3. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 2.2. The translation of the *Sermons* used throughout is that of the Cistercian Fathers series: *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vols. 2–5: *On the Song of Songs I–IV*, ed. M. Basil Pennington, trans. Kilian Walsh and Irene Edmonds (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1971–80). Ann Matter notes the untranslatability of the Vulgate of Song 1:1, the verse that has gotten Bernard so worked up. Over the course of five words, in a paroxysm of alliteration, it contrives to repeat cognate words for "kiss" and "mouth" three times: "Osculetur me osculo oris sui." How to match this in English? Matter's tongue-in-cheek suggestion is, "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his kisser." E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*, Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 126.

4. Bernard, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 9.2.

5. Bernard, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 9.7.

6. Annotated extracts from Denis's *Ennaratio in Canticum canticorum* are conveniently available in translation in Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*, Cistercian Studies 156 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 411–48. More than two hundred pages of Turner's book are composed of translated and annotated extracts from medieval commentaries on the Song. Unless indicated, translations and paragraph numbering of all such commentaries in this article follow Turner.

Cross. Here is a choice snippet from his performance, sung again, but with real emotion this time, and a seemingly economy of gesture:

There He gave me His breast;
 There he taught me a sweet and living knowledge;
 And I gave myself to Him,
 Keeping nothing back;
 There I promised to be His bride.⁷

These performances are seldom seen or heard anymore. Literal readings of the Song of Songs, which take its lyrical language of love and lust to mean what it seems to be saying—*I want your body and I want it now*—have become commonplace in the past century or so, largely replacing the allegorical readings of the Song that proliferated and predominated in preceding centuries.⁸ The literal readings purport to reveal what the allegorical readings sought to conceal. The allegorical readings can themselves be read, therefore, as discourses of sexual repression. But it is as discourses of sexual *expression*—and of deviant sexual expression, at that—that I shall be reading them here. That which must under no circumstances be mentioned in the allegorical readings—the fact that the Song is suffused with erotic desire, that its cheeks are flushed with it, its pages moist with it—everywhere comes to expression in these readings, as we have begun to see. But whereas the enabling assumption of the literal readings is that the Song concerns the mutual attraction between a male and a female, the enabling assumption of the allegorical readings is that the Song concerns the mutual attraction between two males: between a community or individual, on the one hand, classically conceived as male,⁹ and a divine being, on the other hand, also conceived as male.

7. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle* 27. The translation is from *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (New York: Doubleday, 1964). Essentially the *Spiritual Canticle* is a free poetic paraphrase of the Song of Songs.

8. Under “allegorical,” here and throughout, I am subsuming three different “senses of sacred Scripture” that the medieval mind, in particular, generally took pains to distinguish, namely the allegorical, the anagogical, and the tropological (or moral). My usage of the term “literal,” too, is rough and ready by medieval standards; by the thirteenth century the term had become subject to some exquisite refinements.

9. By which I mean simply that in Christian allegorical exegesis of the Song through the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods, the expositor in all but a tiny handful of the extant texts is a male who addresses himself primarily to an audience of male peers, synecdochic stand-ins for the church in its entirety. The first possible exception to the rule is the anonymous twelfth-century Christian commentary on the Song known as the *St. Trudperter Hohelied*, and the first certain exceptions are Mechtild of Magdeburg’s thirteenth-century *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*, which includes mystical meditation on selected verses from the Song, and Teresa of Avila’s sixteenth-century *Conceptos del amor de Dios sobre unas palabras de los Cantares*. See further Helmut Riedlinger, *Die Makellosigkeit*

To put it another way, for ancient and medieval Christian commentators, the Song simply could not be what it seemed to be. That would have been unthinkable. Yet allegorizing it only had the effect of turning it into something still more unthinkable—not just the expression of an erotically charged relationship between a nubile young woman and her virile young man, hidden away among the books of Holy Scripture like a sex manual in a monastery library, but the expression of an erotically charged relationship between two *male* parties instead. The allegorical interpretations of the Song sprang from disinclination, discomfort, or downright disgust on the part of pious male exegetes at the prospect of projecting themselves into the Song in a way that would involve them in an erotic encounter with an imagined or fantasized woman, the female protagonist of the Song,¹⁰ intimate knowledge of whose body or libidinal life is served up in every stich.¹¹ (Is it even possible any longer to read with a straight face

der Kirche in den Lateinischen Hoheliedkommentaren des Mittelalters, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters 38.3 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1958), 226–33 (on the *St. Trudperter Hohelied*); Mechtilde of Magdeburg, *The Revelations of Mechtilde of Magdeburg, or The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, ed. and trans. Lucy Menzies (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1953); and Teresa of Avila, *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, ed. and trans. E. Allison Peers (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946), 2:352–99. Why so few extant meditations or commentaries on the Song by women? The surprise is rather that there are any at all. The most celebrated of the few just listed, that of Teresa, was famously reduced to ashes by the author on the orders of her confessor, alarmed that a woman should presume to pronounce on mystical matters, and it survives (in truncated form) only because another nun had earlier chanced to make a personal copy of the first seven chapters.

10. The poem (if indeed it is a poem and not a mini-anthology of love lyrics) contains three voices: a female voice, a male voice, and a group voice. Of the three, the female voice is the most prominent, delivering most of the lines and initiating most of the exchanges, as Phyllis Tribble observed in "Love's Lyrics Redeemed," in her *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, *Overtures to Biblical Theology* 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 144–65. Tribble is only one of a number of feminist critics who have been drawn to the Song on that account; others include Athalya Brenner, Marcia Falk, Julia Kristeva, Carol Meyers, and Renita Weems. For a catena of relevant quotations from these critics, see J. Cheryl Exum, "Developing Strategies of Feminist Criticism/Developing Strategies for Commentating the Song of Songs," in David J. A. Clines and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Auguries: The Jubilee Volume of the Sheffield Department of Biblical Studies*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement* 269 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 227. The more the Song is presumed to be a unified composition (as opposed to a mere compilation), the more its female protagonist emerges as a coherently delineated character. The presumption of unity was, of course, generally shared by precritical exegetes of the Song, and must have facilitated their imaginative appropriation (and obliteration!) of the protagonist's voice. The prominence of this female voice has also prompted some modern commentators to suggest that the Song was the work of a woman; see most recently André LaCocque, *Romance, She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998).
11. Listen again to Origen, for example: "HIS LEFT HAND IS UNDER MY HEAD, AND HIS RIGHT HAND SHALL EMBRACE ME (Song 2:6). The picture before us in this drama of love is that of the Bride hastening to consummate her union with the Bridegroom. But

the staggering profusion of delicious nonsense occasioned by this discomfort and disgust? "*The meeting of your thighs*. . . . This refers to the coming together of Jews and Gentiles in the one Church of Christ. . . . *Your two breasts* are the two Testaments, from which the children begotten in Christ draw milk for their growth," and so on ad infinitum.¹²) With exquisite irony, however, the austere expositor's attempt to evade the perilous embrace of the woman of the Song plunges him instead into the arms of another lover—a *male* lover, no less, whom he takes to be Christ. ("Each soul living in charity is an individual Bride of Christ," croons Denis the Carthusian, "and so our Lord and Saviour holds her close to him with the arms of love.")¹³ With astonishing ease the male expositor is seduced by the Song into whispering Shulamith's¹⁴ white-hot words of passion into the ear of the fantasized male personage in whose muscular arms he has willingly taken refuge. ("Join with the Bride in saying what she says," admonishes Origen, "so that you may hear also what she heard.")¹⁵ Allegorical exegesis of the Song thereby becomes a sanctioned space—a stage, indeed—for some decidedly queer performances. Finding himself upon this stage, the monk, priest, or prelate, however respectable or repressed he might be in "real" life, is possessed by a divine madness. Throwing off his religious garb and all his inhibitions with it, he paints his nails, decks himself out in flamboyant costumes, and camps it up with abandon. "I am the beautiful Bride in sooth," purrs

turn with all speed to the life-giving Spirit and, eschewing physical terms, consider carefully what is the left hand of the Word of God, what the right; also what His Bride's head is—the head, that is to say, of the perfect soul or of the Church; and do not suffer an interpretation that has to do with the flesh and the passions to carry you away" (*Commentary on the Song of Songs* 3.9). Subsequent allegorists of the Song similarly whisk us away like nervous nannies every time the bride and groom look like they are about to engage in a clinch—though with the passage of time allegorical expositors also developed more subtle strategies for sanitizing the salacious Song. Anne W. Astell notes that "Unlike Origen, whose belief in two loves—carnal and spiritual, demonic and divine—led him to disassociate the literal and allegorical meanings of the Song, twelfth century exegetes upheld a unitary concept of love. They therefore approached the erotic images of the Song in a way that rendered them transparent to their divine tenor, sacramentalizing them, making them vehicles for an organic transference of the *affectus* to Christ the Bridegroom" (*The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press], 178).

12. Examples drawn from Nicholas of Lyra, *The Postilla Litteralis on the Song of Songs* 62–63. For a continuous 382-page catena of ancient and medieval interpretations of the Song, lavishly studded with such gems (but all presented with a solemnity that is positively unnerving in its intensity), see Richard Frederick Littledale, *A Commentary on the Song of Songs from Ancient and Mediaeval Sources* (London: Joseph Masters and Son, 1869).
13. Denis the Carthusian, *Enarratio in Canticum Canticorum* 42.
14. Shulamit(h), or the Shulam(m)ite, is the name traditionally given to the female protagonist of the Song (cf. 6:13).
15. Origen, *Homilies on the Song of Songs* 1.1.

Origen, sashaying across the stage, "and I show not my naked face to any save Thee only, whom I kissed tenderly but now."¹⁶

II. ALLEGORY'S DOUBLE CROSS (WHICH TURNS THE CROSS-BEARING CHRISTIAN INTO A CHRISTIAN CROSS-DRESSER)

It is customary to see Origen as the fountainhead of the Christian allegorical exposition of the Song.¹⁷ Through him the Jewish allegorical interpretation of the Song flowed into the church and irrigated its ascetic imagination.¹⁸ How interesting that the conduit for this stunningly queer body of commentary should himself be thought traditionally to have been a gender anomaly. For if Origen's reading of the Song was scrupulously spiritual, his reading of Matthew 19:12 (Jesus' expression of approval for those "who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven") was scrupulously literal—if Eusebius is to be credited. Squirming uncomfortably and crossing his legs tightly, Eusebius offers an elliptical account of Origen's painfully literal reading of this highly enigmatic verse.¹⁹ But whereas the literal reading of Matthew that Eusebius imputes to Origen was at odds with his spiritual reading of the Song in one sense, in another sense it was not. For he deals with the textual body of the Song in precisely the same way that he has dealt with his own sexual body: he amputates from it anything that might prove an occasion for sin (cf. Matt. 18:8: "And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin . . ."). He reenacts on

16. Origen, *Homilies on the Song of Songs* 1.8.

17. Though the first Christian known to have allegorized the Song was Hippolytus of Rome, fragments of whose commentary on it (ca. 200?) survive.

18. See Ephraim E. Urbach, "The Homiletical Interpretation of the Sages and the Expositions of Origen on Canticles, and the Jewish-Christian Disputation," *Scripta hierosolymitana* 22 (1971): 248–75; Reuven Kimelman, "Rabbi Yohanan and Origen on the Song of Songs," *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980): 567–95.

19. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.8.1–3. Scholars have long been divided over the credibility of Eusebius's testimony, ranging from Henry Chadwick's outright dismissal of it as "malicious gossip" (Chadwick, *The Sentences of Sextus*, Texts and Studies 5 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959], 68; cf. 9–12; idem, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966], 67), to Patricia Cox's more cautious dismissal (*Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983], 88–90), and the relative confidence of others in its veracity (see for instance R. Hanson, "A Note on Origen's Self-Mutilation," *Vigiliae christianae* 20 [1966]: 81–82; Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1983], 54; and Daniel F. Caner, "The Practice and Prohibition of Self-Castration in Early Christianity," *Vigiliae christianae* 51 [1997]: 401). I shall not rehearse the arguments pro and con, as I have nothing substantive to add to them, though it does seem to me that the skeptics have the less convincing case. But even if I were persuaded otherwise, I would be unable to avoid the suspicion that Eusebius is here instinctively acknowledging the intrinsic queerness of Origen's spirituality by assigning him a physical body to match his literary corpus.

the Song that which he has already enacted on his own flesh. He submits the Song to castration. Of course, one could also argue that Eusebius's Origen, in commenting on the Song, was attempting to replace that which he had excised from his own flesh, and one could thereby read his "twenty thousand lines" as a monumental attempt to substitute the phallus for the penis.²⁰

In either case, however, Origen's queer reading of the Song could be said to have proceeded smoothly from the transgressive body that tradition so aptly assigned to him. Of eunuchs in general in the world of late antiquity, and Origen in particular, Peter Brown remarks: "The eunuch was notorious (and repulsive to many) because he had dared to shift the massive boundary between the sexes. He had opted out of being male. By losing the sexual 'heat' that was held to cause his facial hair to grow, the eunuch was no longer recognizable as a man. He was a human being 'exiled from either gender.' Deprived of the standard professional credential of a philosopher in late antique circles—a flowing beard—Origen would have appeared in public with a smooth face, like a woman or like a boy frozen into a state of prepubertal innocence. He was a walking lesson in the basic indeterminacy of the body."²¹

As it happens, the thrilling being who is the ultimate object of desire in Origen's commentary on the Song, and whom he terms "the Bridegroom," is "himself" anatomically indeterminate. He is obviously quite a man—utterly masterful, utterly capable of exhibiting his "husband's power" to the "virginal" soul and initiating her into the "perfect mystery," as Origen coyly puts it²²—yet he is not *all* man. And not only because he is also God, but because he is also a woman. We receive the first inkling of this when, with a ceremonious flourish, Origen unhooks the straps of Song 1:2, "For Thy breasts are better than wine," and the hidden glory of the Bridegroom flops forth.²³ The Bride

20. Boyarin succinctly defines the phallus as "a platonic idea of the penis," *Unheroic Conduct*, 9. The phrase "twenty thousand lines" comes from Jerome's prologue to his Latin translation of the *Homilies*.

21. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 169. Brown, too, takes Eusebius at his word. The notion of eunuchhood as exile is from Claudius Mamertinus, *Panegyrici latini* 11.19.4.

22. Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, prologue, 4.

23. The Bridegroom owes his hermaphroditic cleavage to the LXX and Vulgate translations of Song 1:2, which read *mastoi sou* and *ubera tua* respectively ("your breasts"), whereas the Masoretic text has *dodeka* ("your love"). "The basis for this rendering is somewhat obscure," as G. Lloyd Carr observes, "but both the Hebrew word 'loves' (*dôdîm*) and the Hebrew word 'breasts' (*dadayîm*) would be written simply as *ddm* in the old consonantal text"; *The Song of Solomon: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1984), 73.

is "moved deeply by the beauty of His breasts,"²⁴ and, "after she has been found worthy to receive kisses from the Bridegroom's own mouth, and to enjoy His breasts, says to Him: 'Thy breasts are above wine.'"²⁵ These superb breasts owe nothing to silicon, moreover; they are packed with something altogether superior: "treasures of wisdom and knowledge are concealed in them." And when the Bride "reflects upon the teaching that flows forth from the Bridegroom's breasts, she is amazed and marvels."²⁶

Clearly, Origen's own gender indeterminacy has communicated itself, somehow, to the Bridegroom. Indeed, as one picks one's bemused way through the *Commentary* and the *Homilies*, one can hardly avoid the sneaking suspicion that the Bridegroom, for all his manly posturing, has no male equipment whatsoever. Nothing remotely resembling a tubular or globular appendage is said to dangle from the Bridegroom. What we do learn, however, is that in addition to mammary glands he also has clefts—and is, indeed, himself an outsized cleft. Origen quotes God's eyebrow-raising promise to Moses in Exodus 33:21–23, "Lo, I have set thee in a cleft of the rock, and thou shalt see my back parts," immediately adding: "That Rock which is Christ is, therefore, not completely closed, but has clefts"—is a cleft, in fact, God's cleft, which the spiritual man is enjoined to enter: "But the cleft of the rock is He who reveals God to men, and makes Him known to them; for *no one knoweth the Father, save the Son* [Matt. 11:27]. So no one sees the back parts of God . . . unless he be placed in the cleft of the rock."²⁷ In light of the anatomical anomalies of his Bridegroom, Origen's veiled promise that the virginal soul, once she enters the nuptial chamber where the Bridegroom awaits her, will have "the perfect mystery" revealed to her,²⁸ becomes all the more intriguing.

How paradoxical to have to reassert in the face of these lush spectacles of sensory overload that the allegorical impulse in the exegesis of the Song of Songs stemmed from the radical repudiation of the flesh. Yet that would appear to have been the case. Allegorical exegesis was the child of asceticism. Celibate Christian expositors employed allegory to unsex the salacious Song and render it sublimely spiritual. For these celibates, the Song was a ticking time bomb within Scripture itself, an occasion for sin just waiting to happen, which only the ingenuity of the allegorist could successfully defuse. Only the male who was castrated—literally, or at least metaphorically—could ap-

24. Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 1.2.

25. Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 1.4.

26. Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 1.2.

27. Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 3.15.

28. Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, prologue, 4.

proach this text with impunity. The Song of Songs was a book for eunuchs. Or at least a book for monks.

But monks, too, came increasingly to seem like gender anomalies as the Middle Ages wore on. Boyarin explains: "[S]ince the monk within [medieval] Christian culture has a binary opposite in the knight, the former can be removed from the category of 'real men' within Christianity and stand as an oppositional force to it. Monks, then, effectively form a distinct gender within Christian society, one that is removed from the paternal and sexual order."²⁹ All of which leads one to wonder: Was this why medieval monks evinced such intense fascination with the Song of Songs, or rather with its allegorization? Was this why they multiplied tropological expositions of the Song, expositions of the soul's ardent desire for spiritual union with Christ under the figure of a bride's ardent desire for sexual union with her bridegroom, expositions that turned the exegete into a gender contortionist—but proceeded with remarkable ease nonetheless from the pens of this clerical class (pens apparently unencumbered by the penises of those who wielded them) who already constituted a third gender in relation to their cultural habitat, just as Origen, their neutered progenitor, had in relation to his?

One is further tempted to drape these *spiritual* cross-dressers in the same conceptual garb that Marjorie Garber runs off for *literal* cross-dressers in *Vested Interests*, her encyclopedic study of cross-dressing through the centuries. "[O]ne of the most consistent and effective functions of the transvestite in culture," she claims, "is to indicate the place of what I call 'category crisis,' " by which she means

a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable . . . The binarism male/female, one apparent ground of distinction (in contemporary eyes at least) between "this" and "that," "him" and "me," is itself put into question or under erasure in transvestism, and a transvestite figure, or a transvestite mode, will always function as a sign of overdetermination—a mechanism of displacement from one blurred boundary to another. An analogy here might be the so-called "tagged" gene that shows up in a genetic chain, indicating the presence of some otherwise hidden condition. It is not the gene itself, but its presence, that marks the trouble spot, indicating the likelihood of a crisis somewhere, elsewhere.

In a similar way, I will argue, the apparently spontaneous or unexpected or supplementary presence of a transvestite figure in a text (whether fiction or history, verbal or visual, imagistic or "real") that does not seem, thematically, to be primarily concerned with gender differences or blurred gender indicates a *category crisis else-*

29. Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 26.

where, an irresolvable conflict or epistemological crux that destabilizes comfortable binarity, and displaces the resulting discomfort onto a figure that already inhabits, indeed incarnates, the margin.³⁰

In the case of the classic medieval commentaries on the Song of Songs, I am tempted to merge Garber's reflections on category crisis with those of Boyarin on the medieval monk as constituting a distinct gender,³¹ and speculate that the routine apparitional emergence of "transvestite" figures (males in female guise) in these commentaries—texts that are not concerned thematically with gender difference, much less with gender blurring—indicates a category crisis in medieval society centered on the anomalously gendered person of the male celibate. In the commentaries—more specifically, in the authorial personae created in the commentaries—the anomalous figure of the male celibate is torqued up to an exquisite (and cathartic) extreme until it becomes a figure who (surreptitiously) inhabits, indeed incarnates, the margin: a male author who, not in the name of fiction but of ultimate reality, internalizes a feminine persona so completely that he speaks fluently in her voice, feels with her emotions, and throbs with her sexuality; a male author who might even be said to personify queer gender identity, in that "he" puts powerfully into question the category of stable gender identity itself.

And yet I have little desire to idealize patristic and medieval commentators on the Song of Songs as exotic exemplars of a third gender or third sex. The contempt for the flesh on the part of male celibates that found expression in the allegorical reading of the Song was also, or especially, contempt for *female* flesh. Bernard of Clairvaux, the most prolix commentator of all on the Song, requiring eighty-six sermons to get to the end of its second chapter,³² discovered the path that would eventually lead to these sermons while in full flight from female flesh, according to his intimate friend and biographer William

30. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 16–17, her emphasis.

31. Garber herself in her chapter on "Religious Habits" writes of the perceived femininity of the priest or monk in medieval society: "beardless, wearing a cassock that could be thought to resemble a woman's skirt, devoid of political power, living in quiet obedience, and performing domestic chores"; *Vested Interests*, 218. The chapter carries a telling epigraph from Sydney Smith's 1855 novel, *Lady Holland's Memoir*: "As the French say, there are three sexes—men, women, and clergymen."

32. And thus overtaking Origen, whose three extant books on the Song carry him all the way to 2:15. Bernard began the sermons in 1135 and continued them until his death in 1153. On Bernard's relationship to Origen, who was still a controversial figure in the twelfth century, see G. R. Evans, *The Mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 82–85.

of St. Thierry.³³ In boyhood, Bernard's eyes, then roaming free, would alight from time to time upon a female body, William informs us. Bernard's penis, rudely aroused from slumber, would crane its neck forward curiously for a glimpse, causing its owner to flee in confusion and dunk the offending member (Bernard himself appended to it) in an icy pond until it consented to withdraw its head. Thus it was that Bernard resolved to become a monk. And it was from this same frigid pond, proof against the wiles of the temptress and the treacherous head of the serpent, that Bernard would deliver all eighty-six of his exquisite sermons on the Song, its pages dripping with icy water.

Allegorical exposition of the Song thereby replicates the deadly struggle of male celibacy itself. What must be overcome in either instance is the sexual, the sensual, the fleshly, the female. Small wonder that no other book of sacred Scripture received more reverent attention from male celibates in the ancient and medieval church. It is the book of professional celibates, past masters of repression and sublimation.³⁴ The repressed returns, of course, though not so much with a vengeance as with a wicked sense of humor—the monk, priest, or prelate is deftly transformed into a drag queen as he manfully strives to play the feminine role necessarily thrust upon him by the spiritual reading of the Song.³⁵ And the final ironic twist is the fact that the feminine is what elicits his distrust, if not his outright disgust, ordinarily. This is the double-cross of allegory that turns the cross-bearing Christian into the Christian cross-dresser. Through the (r)use of allegory, the exegete eagerly embraces that from which he is actively in flight.

By annexing a mystified femininity to his own male body, however, the allegorical expositor renders the literal female body redundant. The woman of the Song—and, by extension, woman in general—is symbolically annihilated in the very gesture through which she is idealized. The symbolic world created by these male celibates in their allegorical appropriations of the Song is as free of the polluting presence of real women as the chapterhouse at Clairvaux, an inner sanctum of homosocial sanctity and the literary setting of Bernard's

33. William of St. Thierry et al., *St. Bernard of Clairvaux: The Story of His Life as Recorded in the "Vita Prima Bernardi" by Certain of His Contemporaries, William of St. Thierry, Arnold of Bonnevaux, Geoffry and Philip of Clairvaux, and Odo of Deuil*, trans. Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (London: A.R. Mowbray and Co., 1960). William began the biography around 1147 and covered the first forty years of Bernard's life. After William's death, Arnold of Bonnevaux took up the tale.

34. Not that all commentators on the Song were celibate. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, seems to have been married.

35. Cf. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 137: "The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed."

eighty-six sermons on the Song, delivered to an implied audience of women-free men, the minutiae of whose daily lives are so disposed that they are almost never obliged to lay eyes on a flesh-and-blood daughter of Eve.³⁶ The ecclesiastical tradition of Song of Songs interpretation thus presents us with the paradoxical spectacle of male ascetics preening themselves in front of a mirror. Allegory enables them to look upon the female body in the Song without actually having to see it. In its contours and crevices they only see themselves.

III. CARNIVAL QUEENS

Christian rewriters of the Song of Songs eventually succumbed to the temptation to accord the Blessed Virgin Mary the leading role in the script.³⁷ Casting the Mother of God in the role of Shulamith arguably constituted the apogee of queer commentary on the Song. For now the "holy soul" (potentially female, of course, but implicitly male) is enjoined, not only to become a spiritual drag queen, to internalize the voice, emotions, and sexuality of the female protagonist of the Song, but to do so by modeling himself on the Queen of Queens, the Queen of Heaven, *Beata Maria Virgo*. For the queerest cut of all is that the Virgin, through being enscribed in the Song, has now become Christ's lover as well as his mother.

Listen to the Universal Doctor, Alan of Lille, for example, whose *In Cantica Canticorum ad laudem Deiparae Virginis Mariae elucidatio* was, like the commentary by Rupert of Deutz that inspired it, a mariological tour de force: "And so, although the song of love, Solomon's wedding song, refers particularly and according to its spiritual sense to the Church, in its most particular and spiritual reference it signifies the most glorious Virgin. . . . So it is that in her eagerness for the presence of the Bridegroom, longing for that glorious conception of which she

36. Though Bernard represents himself throughout as an abbot addressing his monks, authorities on the sermons tend to take the view that they were not actually delivered to live audiences. Rather they were dictated to a secretary originally and incessantly revised by Bernard throughout his latter years. See Jean Leclercq, "The Making of a Masterpiece," trans. Kathleen Waters, in Pennington, *On the Song of Songs IV*, ix–xxiv.

37. Rupert of Deutz's *Commentaria in Canticum Canticorum (de Incarnatione Domini)* (ca. 1125) seems to have been a crucial catalyst in this development, though Rupert was anticipated by Ambrose, Epiphanius, and others. The liturgy may have been a more general catalyst. Denys Turner, following J.-M. Salgado, suggests that the mariological interpretation of the Song was encouraged by the practice, documented as early as the eighth century, of including readings of the Song in the offices of the feast of the Assumption and, later on, the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin (though of course this practice also presupposes the mariological interpretation). See Turner, *Eros and Allegory*, 306 n. 1; J.-M. Salgado, "Les Considerations Mariales de Rupert de Deutz dans ses *Commentaria in Canticum Canticorum*," *Divinitas* 32–33 (1988): 692–709.

was told by the angel . . . the glorious Virgin speaks thus: *May he kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.*"³⁸ And the Virgin's urgent desire is more than reciprocated by her Son: "*For your breasts are more delightful than wine:* Which is as much as to say, 'You desire my kisses and I your breasts.' . . . I can read this literally as referring to the Virgin's natural breasts. . . . Christ longed for those breasts, he longed to draw milk from them. . . . Those breasts were to Christ sweeter than wine, sweeter than the most pleasing of all drinks."³⁹

Not to be outdone, the *Doctor ecstaticus*, Denis the Carthusian, declares on the same two verses of the Song:

And so it is most appropriately of this best and wisest of virgin girls that, at that moment when she heard from the holy angel, *Behold, you will conceive in your womb*, and then, *the Holy Spirit will come upon you* that the words may be construed: *May he kiss me with the kiss of his mouth*; that is, the only begotten of God, the heavenly Bridegroom, whom you, O heavenly paranymp, promise to me, you assure me that he will be made incarnate in me and will soon become my son; he deigns to come down to me your poor little handmaiden and unite himself closely and intimately to the substance of my flesh. . . .

For your breasts are more delightful than wine, more fragrant than the finest oils. . . . These could be the words of the special Bride addressed to her own Bridegroom and Son. . . . But they could also be the words of the Bridegroom addressed to his most beloved mother and so may be read: "You, O special Bride, mother and virgin, have asked for the kiss of my mouth, and I gladly consent to your request; *for your breasts are more delightful than wine.* . . . It may be said of those bodily breasts of the most divine Virgin that they, most blessed as they are, are made almost divine by the continual contact of the adorable, incarnate Bridegroom who sucked from them; they *are more fragrant than the finest ointments*, more fragrant, that is to say, than the most delicious virginal milk, which the Lord of all things took and sucked from them."⁴⁰

And so on.

Could it possibly go any further? Of course it could. Bernard, for his part, dares to hint at a similar intimacy between the Father and the Son. Bernard is still on Song 1:1, "Let him kiss me," which he is loath to leave (it occupies his first nine-and-half sermons on the Song). These

38. Alan of Lille, *In Cantica Canticorum* 2–4.

39. Alan of Lille, *In Cantica Canticorum* 8.

40. Denis the Carthusian, *Enarratio in Canticum canticorum* 55, 58. Denis's was the first commentary to treat each verse of the Song with reference to the church, the soul, and the Blessed Virgin in turn, a system adopted by a number of subsequent expositors.

lips of the Bridegroom—"so divinely beautiful"⁴¹—have been kissed before, Bernard suddenly realizes:

It seems to me that a kiss past comprehension, beyond the experience of any mere creature, was designated by him who said: "No one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son" [John 14:31]. . . . For the Father loves the Son whom he embraces with a love that is unique. . . . Now, that mutual knowledge and love between him who begets and him who is begotten—what can it comprise if not a kiss that is utterly sweet, but utterly a mystery as well? For my part I am convinced that no creature, not even an angel, is permitted to comprehend this secret of divine love, so holy and so august. . . . And hence the bride, although otherwise so audacious, does not dare to say: "Let him kiss me with his mouth," for she knows that this is the prerogative of the Father alone. What she does ask for is something less: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." . . .

Thus the Father, when he kisses the Son, pours into him the plenitude of the mysteries of his divine being, breathing forth love's deep delight. . . . As has already been stated, no creature whatsoever has been privileged to comprehend the secret of this eternal, blessed and unique embrace; the Holy Spirit alone is the sole witness of their mutual knowledge and love.⁴²

And the Holy Spirit, infinitely discreet, is not about to tell what he has seen night after night in the triangular bed that he shares with the Father and the Son in the heavenly mansion. Unexpectedly, it is the Son himself who has divulged the secret. In response to the anticipated objection, "What voice thundered forth to you a secret that, you insist, was made known to no creature?" Bernard replies, "It is the only Son, who is in the Father's bosom, who has made it known [John 1:18]. But he has made it known, not to the sorry and unworthy creature that I am," Bernard humbly adds, "but to John, the Bridegroom's friend." More than a friend, as it turns out. This John is the Beloved Disciple, who has had secret knowledge of the Son, even as the Son has had secret knowledge of the Father: "For [John's] soul was pleasing to the Lord, entirely worthy both of the name and the dowry of a bride, worthy of the Bridegroom's embraces, worthy that is of leaning back on Jesus' breast. John imbibed from the heart of the only-begotten Son what he in turn had imbibed from the Father."⁴³

Bernard is now in a position to complete his headlong rush into the place where, on his own account, angels fear to tread—namely, the

41. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 3.5.

42. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 8.1–2, 6.

43. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 8.7.

Blessed Trinity's bedchamber: "Listen if you will know what the kiss of the mouth is: 'The Father and I are one' [John 10:30]; and again: 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me' [John 14:10]. . . . That the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son signifies the kiss of the mouth."⁴⁴ All other earthly lovers, however well endowed, can only wait anxiously outside the door, listening to the awesome sounds of the divine lovemaking within, and hoping to be called to the bedside during a lull in the action, to stand there like a frightened little child: "Paul was certainly a great man, but no matter how high he should aim in making the offer of his mouth, even if he were to raise himself right into the third heaven [cf. 2 Cor. 12:2], he would still of necessity find himself remote from the lips of the Most High. He must abide content within the limits of his capacity, and since he cannot of himself reach that glorious countenance, let him humbly ask that it may lean down to him, that the kiss be transmitted from on high. He however who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped [cf. Phil. 2:6], since he could dare say: 'The Father and I are one' [John 10:30], because he was joined to him as an equal and embraced him as an equal—he does not beg from an inferior position; rather on equally sublime heights mouth is joined to mouth."⁴⁵

For Bernard, however, even the man steadying his "trembling knees" before daring to raise his eyes to the Son's mouth, "so divinely beautiful, not merely to gaze upon it" but to beg a kiss from it,⁴⁶ is himself a sibling of the Son—though not a brother, as one might expect, but a sister. "Let that man who feels that he is moved by the same Spirit as the Son, let him know that he too is loved by the Father," begins Bernard. "Whoever he be let him be of good heart, let his confidence never waver." In the very next sentence, however, the "he" abruptly becomes a "she"—a she-male, or she-soul: "Living in the Spirit of the Son, let such a soul recognize herself as a daughter of the Father, a bride or even a sister of the Son, for you will find that the soul who enjoys this privilege is called by either of these names. Nor will it cost me much to prove it, the proof is ready to hand. They are the names by which the Bridegroom addresses her: 'I come into my garden, my sister, my bride' [Song 5:1]. She is his sister because they have the one Father; his bride because joined in the one Spirit. For if marriage according to the flesh constitutes two in one body, why should not a spiritual union be even more efficacious in joining two in one spirit?"⁴⁷ When the Son leans out of the Father's bed, therefore, to

44. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 8.7.

45. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 8.8.

46. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 3.5.

47. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 8.9.

kiss the man who desires him, and (if it is the man's lucky day) to embrace him, to fondle him, to have intimate knowledge of him, it is not only as a bride but as a bride who also happens to be a sister that he takes him, Bernard implies. Within the divine bedchamber, it would seem, incest is the spiritualized sexual relationship of choice, whether between Son and mother, or Son and Father, or Son and sister.

Allegorical exegesis of the Song thereby becomes an ecclesiastically sanctioned space not only for an ordinarily prohibited homoeroticism, but for covert violation of a still more solemn taboo. Once again allegorical exegesis of the Song creates a carnivalesque zone in which certain of the nonnegotiable moral strictures that structure everyday existence are effortlessly overturned—and, what is more, overturned in the name of the absolute moral Authority. The apogee of queerness is, in this instance as in others, also the apogee of paradox.

But it is also the apogee of gleeful self-sabotage. For if the allegorical reading of the Song is an insubordinate (if sublimated) performance of sex, and hence of gender, the rules that are thereby being transgressed are precisely those that the readers themselves (monks, priests, prelates) have undertaken to make and maintain. Through the infinitely malleable medium of a series of ancient erotic love poems, a theocratic elite engages in its own self-subversion, its frocked members falling over each other in their zeal to deconstruct the socio-religious norms that they have dedicated their lives to upholding.

But in all of this there is, to a degree, nothing exceptional or unexpected. Readers of Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* will be primed to recognize here a signal instance of the literary carnivalesque.⁴⁸ Bakhtin begins by noting how carnival festivities and the comic spectacles and parodic rituals associated with them had a prominent place in medieval culture. "Besides carnivals proper, with their long and complex pageants and processions, there was the 'feast of fools' (*festa stultorum*) and the 'feast of the ass'; there was a special free 'Easter laughter' (*risus paschalis*), consecrated by tradition. Moreover, nearly every Church feast had its comic aspect, which was also traditionally recognized," and so on.⁴⁹ Bakhtin sharply distinguishes the official festivals of medieval Europe, however—ecclesiastical festivals in particular—from the carnival. The official festivals "sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it." They "asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions."⁵⁰

48. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984; Russian original 1965).

49. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 5.

50. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 9.

Carnival, in contrast—at least in Bakhtin's utopian reimagining of it—"celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions."⁵¹ But the carnivalesque also found potent expression in "comic verbal compositions." The incendiary product of a long evolutionary history, with its roots in Christian antiquity, high medieval comic literature "was infused with the carnival spirit and made wide use of carnival forms and images." It paraded "in the disguise of legalized carnival licentiousness and in most cases was systematically linked with such celebrations . . . It was the entire recreational literature of the Middle Ages." In an era in which good-sized cities devoted three months a year on average to carnival festivities, "the influence of the carnival spirit was irresistible: it made a man renounce his official state as monk, cleric, scholar, and perceive the world in its laughing aspect. Not only schoolmen and minor clerics but hierarchs and learned theologians indulged in gay recreation as relaxation from pious seriousness. 'Monkish pranks' (*joca monacorum*) was the title of one of the most popular medieval comic pieces. Confined to their cells, monks produced parodies or semiparodies of learned treatises and other droll Latin compositions."⁵²

Alternatively they produced allegorical commentaries on the Song of Songs—compositions no less carnivalesque in their audacious suspension of certain of the fundamental norms and prohibitions that constrained and sustained Christian medieval culture. And yet it is safe to assume that these commentaries were not *consciously* written in the antinomian spirit of carnival. The allegorists were not consciously indulging in "gay [!] recreation" or "relaxation from pious seriousness," but, on the contrary, understood themselves to be engaged in an endeavor of the utmost seriousness and sanctity. The conscious intent of the commentators thus paralleled that of the official church festivals, which "asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions."⁵³ Again and again we see the ecclesiastical and

51. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.

52. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 13. An early example of the ecclesiastical carnivalesque was *Coena Cypriani*, a brazen travesty of the entire Bible. Later came the *parodia sacra*, a cluster of parodical liturgies, litanies, hymns, psalms, prayers (not excluding the Pater Noster and the Ave Maria), gospel stories, and even dominical sayings. "All of it was consecrated by tradition and, to a certain extent, tolerated by the Church. It was created and preserved under the auspices of the 'Paschal laughter,' or of the 'Christmas laughter'; it was in part directly linked, as in the parodies of liturgies and prayers, with the 'feast of fools' and may have been performed during this celebration" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 14).

53. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 9.

political status quo being affirmed and reified in the commentaries, the prelates of the church, in particular, having their God-given right to govern the masses repeatedly validated by ingenious appeal to this most unlikely of authorities, this ancient Hebrew celebration of unmarried love and lust.⁵⁴ Like the official church festivals, too, the commentaries celebrate theological, christological, soteriological, ecclesiological, and ethical truths deemed eternal, immutable, and indisputable. "This is why the tone of the official feast was monolithically serious," observes Bakhtin, "and why the element of laughter was alien to it"⁵⁵—as alien as it is to the commentaries.

But the apparent ecclesiastical soundness of the commentaries merely disguises their viral nature. What the commentaries actually represent is the surreptitious invasion and infection of the official ecclesiastical order by the anarchic element forever encamped on its borders—an element most truly *in* its element in the world-inverting world of carnival. Independently of any conscious agency, these commentaries thus combine to form a capacious Trojan horse through which the giants, dwarfs, and other "monsters" of the carnival (not least those who defy gender classification) infiltrate the cathedral at the most solemn moment of High Mass and cavort all over the altar. The repressed always returns—but only masked and in costume.

IV. AFTER THE CARNIVAL (THE COMMENTATOR REMOVES HIS MAKEUP)

Of course, the carnival always had its critics, and eventually they would succeed in shutting it down. Already at the end of the fourth century, Theodore of Mopsuestia had dared to commit to writing a reading of the Song of Songs that spurned allegory altogether and purported to embrace the literal sense. In 553, a century or so after Theodore's death, his reading was officially condemned at the Second Council of Constantinople.⁵⁶ Theodore's near-contemporary Jovinian,

54. With no wedding veil in sight and no apparent interest in procreation. Yet everywhere they looked in the Song, the theocratic elite saw their own authority affirmed and celebrated—as even casual perusal of the vast welter of material assembled in Littledale, *The Song of Songs from Ancient and Mediaeval Sources*, reveals, so much of it taking the form of statements such as the following: "the breasts [of the Bride] are the Doctors of the Church, who supply spiritual nourishment to her children" (173).

55. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 9.

56. Though it is often assumed that Theodore produced a commentary on the Song, there is actually no evidence that he did. The Acts of the Council of Constantinople quote an extract from a personal letter of Theodore to a friend, which indicates that he declined to assign any allegorical significance to the Song, regarding it instead as love poetry written by Solomon in defense of his decision to marry an Egyptian princess. There are no extant fragments of an actual commentary by Theodore on the Song, however, nor do the catalogues of his titles list any such work.

meanwhile, proposed a parallel reading of the Song in the West, for which he was berated by Jerome, among others.⁵⁷

Under the church's withering glare, the carnal reading shriveled up and retreated almost completely from Christian commentaries on the Song for more than a millenium.⁵⁸ Emboldened by the Reformation and the Enlightenment, the carnal interpretation began to inch its way in earnest into erudite discourse on the Song only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,⁵⁹ and in the nineteenth century began to wrest the Song out of the grip of the allegorical interpretation altogether.

Like a man who awakes bleary-eyed and hungover one overcast morning to discover to his immense horror that he is in another man's bed, wrapped in its owner's arms, commentary on the Song of Songs began to recoil sharply from allegory during the nineteenth century. Slipping stealthily out of bed and hastily adjusting its clerical collar, it tiptoed out of the room.⁶⁰ Like reformed and newly sober men,

57. See Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 7c (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), 119–20, for details.

58. Though not from popular readings, as would appear from numerous indications in the commentaries. Denis the Carthusian, for example, his cheeks flushed with indignation, quotes the Chancellor of Paris, "the most learned master John Gerson," himself the author of a commentary on the Song, as follows: "No one should be distracted from belief in the most hidden and pure senses which the smokescreen of the literal [sense] disguises in carnality, nor should a person hit the rock of scandal of a foul sensuality. It would be shameful to repeat what I have heard for myself: it would offend pious ears" (*Enarratio in Canticum canticorum* 16). "Oh, do tell!" the prurient reader can hardly help exclaiming. Chaucer, in contrast, is happy to tell. In "The Merchant's Tale" he has the lecher Januarie propose a resolutely carnal reading of the Song; see *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. F. N. Robinson (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), lines 2132–49. Popular profanations of the Song were not unknown among Jews either. B. *Sanhedrin* 12.10 attributes a stern warning to Rabbi Aqiba: "Whoever sings the Song of Songs with tremulous voice in a banquet hall and (so) treats it as a sort of ditty has no share in the world to come" (cf. b. *Sanhedrin* 101a).

59. J. G. von Herder's *Salomon's Lieder der Liebe, die ältesten und schönsten aus den Morgenlande* (Leipzig, 1778) is often seen as pivotal in this regard, though several isolated voices arguing for a thoroughgoing literal interpretation of the Song preceded Herder's, such as Sebastian Castellio[n], *Notae in Canticum Canticorum in Biblia latina* (Geneva, 1547), Hugo Grotius, *Ad Canticum Canticorum* (1644), Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, *Libri Salomonis, Canticum Canticorum* (Paris, 1693), and William Whiston, *A Supplement to Mr. Whiston's Late Essay, towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament, Proving That the Canticles Is Not a Sacred Book of the Old Testament; Nor Was Originally Esteemed As Such Either by the Jewish Or the Christian Church* (London, 1723). Martin Luther stands on the fringes of this group; in his *Vorlesung über des Hohelied* (1530–31; Eng. trans. Ian Siggins, in *Luther's Works* 15 [St. Louis: Concordia, 1972], 189–264) he expressed dissatisfaction with the allegorical tradition but hesitated to go all the way with the literal interpretation.

60. In scholarly circles, just as literal readers of the Song were voices crying in the wilderness in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, allegorical readers have been the isolated voices in the twentieth century. They have included Paul Joüon, *Le Cantique des Cantiques: Commentaire philologique et exégétique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1909); André Robert, Raymond Tournay, and André Feuillet, *Le Cantique des Cantiques: Traduction et commen-*

late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century commentators labored to straighten out the queer reading to which the Song had so long been subjected. The Song was turned instead into a celebration of, indeed a warrant for, heterosexuality. Already Franz Delitzsch was able to announce in his 1875 commentary: "The Song transfigures natural but holy love. Whatever in the sphere of the divinely-ordered marriage relation makes love the happiest, firmest bond uniting two souls together, is presented to us here in living pictures."⁶¹ Similar assertions could be multiplied and extend all the way down to the present.⁶²

What might this new homiletic of heteronormativity in Song of Songs interpretation signify? It is hard to resist the temptation to put it down to the rise of heterosexuality. The "invention" of heterosexuality seems to have coincided approximately with the invention of electricity, photography, automotive engineering, and other indispensable appurtenances of modernity. The first use of the term "heterosexual" is now routinely dated to 1869.⁶³ Is it entirely by chance that the emergence of heterosexuality, with its sharply delineated and strictly policed sexual borders, should coincide with the decline of the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs, with its blurry and poorly policed sexual borders? "Before" heterosexuality, "normal" men could get up

taire, *Études bibliques* (Paris: Gabalda, 1963); and Luis Stadelmann, *Love and Politics: A New Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1992). Yet these twentieth-century allegorists tend to be worlds apart from Bernard of Clairvaux or Saint John of the Cross. All three of the above, for example, interpret the Song as an allegory of Israelite history—a far more restrained affair than its interpretation as an allegory of the soul's conjugal union with Christ.

61. Franz Delitzsch, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, trans. M. G. Easton (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), 5. The interpretation of the Song as a series of ancient Hebrew wedding songs also made its appearance in the late nineteenth century—in J. G. Wetzstein's appendix to Delitzsch's commentary, for example (162–76), but particularly in the work of Karl Budde: "Was ist das Hohelied?" *Preussische Jahrbücher* 78 (1894): 92–117; "Das Hohelied erklärt," in Karl Budde, Alfred Bertholet, and D. G. Wildeboer, *Die fünf Megillot, Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament 6* (Freiburg, Leipzig, and Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1898), 9–48.
62. Passing through Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, for example, and finding expression in the most recent large-scale commentary on the Song, that of Roland E. Murphy. See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958–61), 1:288–329, 2:291–324, and 4:116–240; Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or The Song of Songs*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 100. Numerous other examples may be found in Pope, *Song of Songs*, 192–205, a survey of the "notable trend" of interpreting the Song as "human love poetry" (192).
63. The term first appears in a letter from Karl Maria Kertbeny to fellow sexologist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs. The passage from *terminus technicus* to ubiquitous ideology, however, was a protracted one. Its progress is painstakingly traced in Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995). For a useful companion to Katz, see Diane Richardson, ed., *Theorising Heterosexuality: Telling It Straight* (Buckingham, U.K.: Open University Press, 1996).

to things with other men that they could not easily get up to “after” heterosexuality—*intimate* things, erotic or otherwise. The consummately queer body of allegorical commentary on the Song of Songs that we have been considering bespeaks, indeed presupposes, a lack of homosexual panic in the cultures in which it was conceived—in which case the pervasiveness of homosexual panic in twentieth-century Western culture would explain the rejection of the allegorical approach to the Song even by male readers innocent or wary of the “discoveries” of critical biblical scholarship (such as the non-Solomonic authorship of the book, and its family resemblance to other Ancient Near Eastern love poetry). The interpretation of the Song as a celebration of heterosexual love is now commonplace even among conservative Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish scholars.⁶⁴ It is not that these conservative biblical scholars are any less convinced than their ancient or medieval counterparts that God addresses them and us in and through the Song of Songs. But they do still tend, almost to a man, to be male,⁶⁵ and one strongly suspects that, as polished products of heterosexuality, they simply have problems internalizing the central voice of the Song—the feminine voice—that their preheterosexual male counterparts did not have; that they have trouble throwing themselves into the role of a vivacious young woman in love; that the intrinsic queerness of the role sits too strangely in a culture that has scripted them to be superlatively straight at all times—a culture that has already cast them in a dizzyingly different role, indeed, that of the ultimate custodians of its straightness. All of which suggests that the interpretive history of the Song of Songs constitutes yet another fascinating footnote in the infinitely intricate history of sexuality.

64. See Pope, 193–205 passim; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 40–41.

65. To the best of my knowledge, J. Cheryl Exum was the first woman ever to publish a scholarly article on the Song: “A Literary and Structural Analysis of the Song of Songs,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 85 (1973): 47–79. By now there are many women writing on the Song—but few of them could be classed as conservative.



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THE ROOTS OF RESTRICTION: WOMEN IN EARLY ISRAEL

CAROL MEYERS

During the Late Bronze Age, wars, famines, and plagues created a demographic crisis which intensified the role of women in domestic affairs and childbearing. When the crisis passed, the restriction of women to domestic circles was ingrained in Israelite society and ultimately became the basis for their subordination through the remainder of the biblical period and on into modern times.

Perhaps the most significant advances in biblical studies in recent years have come about through scholarly efforts to understand the emergence of earliest Israel in terms of its social dynamics. These studies of the origins of Israel, which benefit from anthropological analyses of group behavior and social change, have made it no longer possible to contemplate the beginnings of biblical tradition as theological history or as a kind of history of holiness. To do so, however pious the motives, becomes instead an ultimately irrelevant and perhaps irreverent exercise because it precludes full understanding. Rather,

attempts at reconstructing any period in antiquity must involve a sensitivity to and consideration of the entire historico-cultural spectrum which affects human development, individually or in groups.

In a sense, the archeological investigation of the Near Eastern past has fostered and facilitated such a contextual approach to scriptural study by making available the nonbiblical materials essential for understanding the matrix of Israelite life. Ironically, however, the very archeological revolution which brought about this new approach also became a serious stumbling block for reaping all its benefits. Archeology, enamored of and elated by its intimate contact with objects of the past, felt itself in possession of the key to that past.

For a long time, the exclusive preoccupation with material relics and political history (with little or no attention given to the social dynamics of the people who left these relics) limited the analysis of

the archeological data. But now, aided by the insights of modern social science, archeologists are in a better position to understand how ancient societies operated and what social and ideological changes occurred in the ancient world. Such investigation of the process of social change has been particularly important in the study of ancient Israel's early formation and development.¹

If the emerging interest in reconstructing all dimensions of a crucial era in human history is to be expressed in thorough and balanced investigation, then it cannot do what so much of social history in the past has done, systematically omit or slight roughly half of humanity. In the natural and social history of any groupings of people, that slighted half — women — controls certain unique and critical functions within society. As the Harvard social historian David Herlihy puts it (1978: 56), women "carry the new generation to term, sustain children

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in early life, and usually introduce the young to the society and culture of which they will be a part. [In other words,] women begin the processes through which human cultures strive to achieve what their individual members cannot — indefinite life, immortality.”

Moreover, an examination of women's social position, while eminently cogent and important for historical studies of any period of our past, becomes extraordinarily

turned out to be the very force which caused a dramatic turnabout in the history of women. Yet, as more and more material from the ancient world becomes available to us, the realities of the status of women in ancient societies, including their role in religious life, are becoming invisible behind the double veils of time and misapprehension. It is being discovered that the position and role of women in society were very different in some crucial areas

We are conditioned by three thousand years of male dominance.

pertinent and imperative in consideration of biblical society, especially in its formative and idealistic period. That specific period is the one in which the biblical community was formed, a community bound in covenant with God through the leadership of Moses and developing its characteristic and radical new way of looking at the world and living in that world in the few centuries after Moses and before the Davidic monarchy. Archeologically, this formative period coincides with the closing decades of the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of centuries of the Iron Age in Palestine.

Concern for the evaluation of the social history of women during the early Israelite experience arises from the fact that this is precisely the period in which one of the major — if not *the* major — transitions occurred in the history of the position and role of women in the world. Some three thousand years of male dominance in western civilization, and in particular in religious institutions, have clouded our vision of the prebiblical past and have led to the belief that the exclusion of females from regular leadership, at least in public and/or religious life, has been the norm in human history. Further, it is difficult, psychologically and emotionally, to deal with the fact that the liberating principles of Mosaic Israel and the egalitarian society which it set about to establish

than what they became subsequent to the beginnings of Israel.

For this reason, historical investigation of women in the formative period is crucial — otherwise, it is too easy to fall prey to the same process which has led to the gradual later misogynistic interpretations of early biblical tradition. It is needed to correct anachronistic interpretations as well as statements taken out of context and used dogmatically and authoritatively. Moreover, this investigation is necessary to identify long-ignored functional aspects within a particular setting of what appears in the finished scriptural product as God-given sanctions.

Perhaps this point should be illustrated before proceeding. The story of the Garden of Eden provides a parade example. The creation and early activity of male and female in the stories of the glorious garden of Genesis 2 and 3 present no evidence for any theory of subordination or inferiority of women (Trible 1973: 35-42; Higgins 1976). If anything, the opposite is true. Read on its *own terms*, the story shows a primordial male who appears passive and submissive. This ancient tale must have been understood this way for centuries as part of Hebraic literature.

Yet somewhere and gradually along the line, complicated socio-historical processes which cannot be traced here turned the edenic paradigm upside down. By the late

biblical period, a rash of religious literature, produced by Jewish groups and nascent Christianity, took considerable pains to demonstrate that Eve was significant not as the source of life but rather as the source of death and evil (Prusak 1974); and, therefore, women needed to be controlled and dominated by their male relatives.

Centuries of such distortions resulting from later interpretations of biblical traditions involving women can come to an end, it seems, only by going back to the very beginnings of Israelite life, where it all began, for it was then that there occurred a shift in sexual roles and meanings that was to have a profound and lasting impact.

In order to appreciate this shift, it is important to consider the Near Eastern cultures from which Israel emerged. The Bronze Age religious ideology against which early Israel rebelled was the product of a millennia-old pattern. The pantheons of divine beings exalted in Near Eastern antiquity represented those forces in nature upon which humanity was dependent

The creation stories give no evidence for the subordination or inferiority of women.

but which humanity could not bring under its control. Fertility was an underlying concern. Fertility cults in which mankind could create mechanisms for exerting control of or at least influence over the capricious natural world helped resolve humanity's helplessness and anxiety in the face of rainfall or lack of it, sunshine or lack of it, blight or lack of it. The great goddesses and great gods mated, producing a union of earth and sun/rain necessary for productivity. Cultic rehearsals of this union, while tantalizingly vague and distant in the face of our modern inquiries, seem to have taken place within the context of what is described by the suitably ill-defined phrase “fertility cult.”

The particular Canaanite

manifestations of such religious ideologies are generally described in terms of their relationship to the impoverished — in comparison to Egypt or Mesopotamia — resources of Syria-Palestine. Thus, the emphasis tends to focus on fertility of the soil. Yet, concerns with human fertility should not be excluded from the parameters of pagan religion. Particularly in the land bridge of Syria-Palestine, and in contrast to the relative stability and tendency toward over-population in the Nile and Tigris-Euphrates Valleys (Kilmer 1972: 166-72), frequent outbreaks of violence added to the natural insecurity of continuity of human life. The repeated prophetic warning in the Bible about the triple threat of death through famine, pestilence, and the sword bears with it an urgent concern for the continued existence of any socio-political group. Warfare, famine, and disease were inseparable forces posing continuing threats to human existence. At certain times of upheaval, population losses far exceeded natural increment. Depopulation — i.e, decline in population — was a recurrent fact, archeologically demonstrable (Angel 1972). Population growth, or the replenishing of the population, was a societal aim, expressed in Israel's national literature (Frymer-Kensky 1977: 150, 152), in the face of considerable

worshipped as the creator of all life, as the female principle which was the source of life. The mystery of birth and of all creation and thus of human existence itself rested in the female power. From as early as the Old Stone Age onward (ca. 30,000 B.C.E.), material expressions of religious convictions by which mankind sought to establish links to that divine creative power have been found (James 1958: 113ff.). In the various places of Stone Age habitation, the naked female figurines with exaggerated sexual features are found, attesting to the cult of the Great Goddess. By the time of the great Bronze Age cultures of the Near East, the supreme Mother Goddesses were joined by or in some cases superseded by male deities. The societal changes connected with this transition have yet to be explored fully, since they are difficult to retrieve from the limited documents of antiquity.

Though it seems that a patriarchal system replaced the primary role of women in primitive agricultural-village economies, reflected in and by the Great Mother Goddess, the primacy of the female role nonetheless persisted in a limited way. The documents of Mesopotamian and Egyptian cities show women involved in a variety of public positions and occupations, exercising economic and legal rights,

During the Bronze Age, the Great Mother Goddess cult remained strong.

environmental odds at various points in ancient Palestinian history.

The biological experiences of women in Bronze Age society were undoubtedly keyed to this fact. The fertility cults, however crucial for a concept of agrarian productivity, were no less crucial for notions of human reproduction. In this respect, the Near Eastern high goddesses are featured in the role of the Great Mother (Neumann 1963) who some believe was the Supreme Deity in the ancient world until the 3rd millennium. She was revered and

which varied from place to place and from time to time (Batto 1974; Harris 1976).

Perhaps the most important arena within which women functioned was the temple precincts. Priestesses served the gods and goddesses. The elaborate temple organizations within the royal bureaucracy included female public servants. Some women functioned sexually in such occupations, as references to cultic sexuality attest. Others, it seems, refrained from sexuality and marriage by entering



Terra-cotta figurine from Syria (late 2nd millennium B.C.), presumably of the goddess Astarte. Similar figurines have been found at other sites throughout Syria-Palestine, attesting to the importance of female deities in the cultic practices of the Bronze Age.

a sort of convent existence (Harris 1964). It is hard to reconstruct the social motivations for such a choice. Indeed, certain kinds of temple service for women may have represented an escape from the high risks and rigors of childbirth, and/or a way to provide economically for unmarried women. At least certain ancient mythographers saw a relationship between those cultic roles for women involving chastity and celibacy and the social necessity for population control by the limiting of child bearing (Kilmer 1972: 171-72; Frymer-Kensky 1977: 149-50).

Whatever the social dynamics of the situation in the Late Bronze Age urban life may have been, certain facts about female roles emerge, dimly perhaps, but nonetheless apparent. The persistent strengths and appeals of Anat and Asherah (cf. Judg 3:7; 1 Kgs 15:13 = 2 Chr 15:16; 1 Kgs 18:19; Jer 44:15ff.) in the Bible itself are evidence of the active participation of women in cultic, and therefore public life. Women served female deities and the female deities served women in return, affirming their

ultimate creative worth.

All the above is in a sense introductory and thus is oversimplified and generalized as a preface to the problem posed at the outset, namely, investigating the social grounding for the transformation of women's position during early Israel to the limited and subordinate status that had become normative by late biblical times.

Early Israel, it has been shown (Gottwald 1975a: 93-98; Mendenhall 1973: 194-97), constituted a radical break with the city-state feudalism and nation-state imperialism of Late Bronze Age Palestine. The description of the motivation for that break (and the implementation through the Yahwistic covenant of a liberating replacement for city-state oppression) involves an understanding of the life of the peasantry (Mendenhall 1976b: 133-38; Chaney forthcoming). The natural resources of Palestine could no longer support an inflated urban bureaucracy and thus Late Bronze Age peasant society was at the subsistence level. The so-called Israelite "Conquest" represents a return of a full share of the

products of the land to the people, a cessation of the continuous draining contributions to urban bureaucracies (Mendenhall 1962). The fact that nearly half of the Book of Joshua is concerned with tribal allotments points to the early Israelite recovery of land so that the people, according to their several tribes, would derive the benefit therefrom.

Claims to land ownership, once the domination of the city-based power structures had broken down, depended to a great extent on populating that land (cf. Exod 23:23-30). In addition to establishing local tribal control over certain territories formerly administered by oppressive city-states, the Israelite federation was about to embark upon the settlement of previously uninhabited territories, namely, the core of Palestine, the central hill country.

This territory was largely empty throughout the Bronze Age (Thompson 1975: 39-50), except for occasional, usually minor sites near springs and in valleys. Generally poor soil and scarce water supplies precluded significant habitation, particularly if Bronze Age urban centers siphoned off a portion of the meager productivity. If anything,

Standardized worship scene on a Mesopotamian cylinder seal of the early Middle Bronze Age. A worshipper is led toward an enthroned deity by a priestess (though perhaps a goddess).



the Late Bronze Age had even fewer settlements in the hill country proper than the preceding Middle Bronze Age centuries.

The ensuing Iron Age, in sharp contrast, brought an extensive settlement of this region (Thompson 1975: 66-67). Technically, the storage of water in lined cisterns, the introduction of iron in the manufacture of farm tools, and the development of methods of agricultural terracing resolved the environmental difficulties and made this demographic shift possible. An enormous amount of human energy was required, however, to clear land that had never before been tilled, to

free peasantry? Thus far, two major issues emerge in the attempt to answer these questions. Both of these had dramatic effects upon women and, while seemingly independent of each other, may prove ultimately to be interrelated.

The first issue concerns the biological need for productivity, the need to effect a population increase. Israel was obsessed both with having descendants to inherit its portion and with keeping its land-holdings within its kinship-based groups. In investigating this issue, anthropological and paleo-osteological studies which seek to describe fluctuations in ancient populations are extremely

survive the age of eighteen (Smith forthcoming). For those who did survive to adulthood, another clear pattern existed: the mortality rate of females in the child-bearing years greatly exceeded that of the males (Genovés 1969: 441-43; Goldstein 1969: 486). In a population in which the life expectancy for men would be 40, women would have a life expectancy closer to 30. Consequently, it should not be surprising that the elders of any ancient tribal system were males, since a greater proportion of males would have survived into the chronological seniority which was at the basis of political seniority and leadership. It is no wonder that ancient biologists, Aristotle among them, proclaimed that the males of all species live longer than the females. It is a relatively modern phenomenon that the converse is true for humans. Women in antiquity were a class of humanity in short supply.

Paleo-pathologists have established that the cause of half, if not more, of all deaths, whatever the age of the individual at the time of death, was the presence of endemic parasitic disease, that is, infections which occur in a community more or less all the time without much alteration in their effects from year to year or even century to century (Hare 1954: 32-66). The biblical term "pestilence" (*deber*) seems to be used in reference to such endemic disease. Very young children and old people, being the most susceptible to such infections, were the most likely to succumb. This fact is archeologically evident in the high infant mortality rate as well as in the scarcity of people past forty. To put it bluntly, in normal times, families would have had to produce twice the number of children desired in order to achieve optimal family size.

The outbreak of epidemics, or the *abnormal* occurrence of acute infectious disease, reduced the usual low life expectancy even further. Epidemiological statistics, for historic periods in which records were kept, show the devastating effects of plague upon mortality rates. For example, in the plague-free early

The Israelite "Conquest" involved a return of the land to the peasants and a cessation of urban control.

build homes and villages where none had existed, and to cut back forests and undergrowth that had covered the landscape since time immemorial.

This understanding of early Israel as an agrarian peasantry is dispelling the romantic attachment to the notion of a biblical bias in favor of some sort of bedouin or seminomadic ideal. This understanding likewise affords an appreciation of a biblical undercurrent protesting — understandably so considering the ills and evils of Late Bronze Age Canaanite cities — against urban life. The first city, for example, is built according to biblical tradition by the first murderer (Gen 4:17). The concluding exhortation of the Holiness Code (Lev 26:25-26) links city life — "if you gather within your cities" — with famine, disease, and violence. The negative experience underlying such a bias is clear. The orientation of the period of the judges rejected the urban centers.² In this process there arose social sanctions, ultimately translated into law, which strengthened and favored land-based village life.

Against this background, what was life like for roughly half the population? How were women to do their share in espousing and furthering the Yahwistic ideals of a

valuable.³ Such studies inevitably lead to descriptions of mortality rates — or life expectancies — in the premodern world. In particular, the analysis of skeletal remains from various periods of Palestinian history (Giles 1951, 1953; Hughes 1965; Smith forthcoming) provides information about life expectancies. Excavations in Palestine have included — and in a sense began with — the investigation of tomb groups. Ironically, the skeletal remains of human beings from these tombs have so far received relatively slight attention; tomb studies have tended to focus on typologies of grave goods or of the tomb chambers themselves. However, although osteological studies have been carried out on relatively small numbers of the actual skeletal remains, the results present valid evidence for general demographic conditions and fluctuations in ancient Palestine, since the results of those studies correspond exceedingly well to the results of similar studies on all premodern populations (Genovés 1969; Goldstein 1969).

To begin with, the death rate was clearly highest among the preadult population. In one tomb group, 35% of the individuals died before the age of five, and nearly half of the individuals did not

medieval years in Europe, life expectancy has been estimated as being between 35 and 40 years. For the generations during and immediately following the Black Death (1348-49), which introduced an epoch of recurring plagues, the average life expectancy was as low as 17 or 18 years. It took nearly 100 years or more thereafter for life spans to creep back up to around 30 (Herlihy 1978: 56).

The Bible has a word that seems to describe such abnormal outbreaks of disease. This word, *maggephah*, normally translated "plague" (as opposed to "pestilence"), appears in several biblical accounts, chiefly in certain non-priestly narratives of Numbers, and also once in Exodus. Despite the layers of later explanations, these passages have preserved certain critical incidents of Israel's formative period and thus provide important information about public health and population density.

One such episode is Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16. The nature of the violent power struggle within the Israelite camp depicted here is peripheral to the present discussion. What does attract attention is the devastating plague associated with this rebellion in the mind of the biblical writer. The 250 leaders of the Korahites were consumed in a fire coming forth from the Lord. But God's wrath did not stop there; before Moses could carry out his efficacious atoning acts, 14,700 more deaths were recorded. There can be little doubt that this devastating plague, however that large and symbolic-sounding figure is to be interpreted, decimated the nascent community.

Num 21:6 recounts another population loss. In this instance, the actual word *maggephah* is not used. Nonetheless, the description seems to reflect a plague situation: "Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, so that many people of Israel died."

Another passage, Num 11:1-3, while not mentioning plague or pestilence specifically, describes in similar language the effects of the

wrath of God at a place called Taberah, which in itself means "Burning" (Mendenhall 1973: 109, and nn. 17, 18). At this particular place God's anger — attributed to the complaining of the people — was kindled and the "fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some outlying parts of the camp." The destructive fever of plague, an outbreak of some kind of epidemic disease, seems to be the life situation, theologically interpreted, which gives rise to the association between divine anger and punitive, consuming heat/fire. The text does not give the number of casualties, but the losses in the Israelite camp must have been severe.

Exodus 32 provides one additional text dealing with death by plague. In the story of the Golden Calf, a plague caused the loss of an unspecified portion of the population (v 35: "And the Lord sent a plague upon the people, because they made the calf which Aaron made").

Epidemic disease was clearly rampant. This clustering of biblical texts dealing with the age of Moses and using the word "plague" or *maggephah* reflects a public health crisis. Furthermore, nearly every extrabiblical source from the Late Bronze Age indicates the devastation wrought by epidemic infections. Perhaps the most famous of these is the Plague Prayer of Mursilis (*ANET*: 394-96), though disruption

Numbers 16:44-50

(This is the story of Korah's rebellion, which was probably a kind of power struggle within the priesthood).

And the Lord said to Moses, "Get away from the midst of this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces. And Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and lay incense on it, and carry it quickly to the congregation, and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone forth from the Lord, the plague has begun." So Aaron took it as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and behold, the plague had already begun among the people; and he put on the incense and made atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stopped. Now those who died by the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the affair of Korah. And Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance of the tent of meeting, when the plague was stopped.

Num 14:11 is another relevant text: except for Joshua (who brings back a good report), the spies who had gone into Canaan are said to have died from the plague.

Another incident, the unfortunate sequence of events at Beth Baal Peor (Mendenhall 1973: 105-21), stems from the Mosaic period and is recounted in Numbers 25. In some sort of orgiastic rite, various Israelite men participated in sacrifice to the Baal of Peor (Peor seems to be related to a Hittite word for "fire," which underlies that English word) and in relationships with the local unmarried Midianite girls. God's anger was kindled and turned upon Israel. No fewer than 24,000 people died in that epidemic which broke out among the people.

and devastation because of plague are recorded in other sources such as the Amarna letters. A similar situation did not occur again in Palestine until 200-250 years later in the period of the Philistine wars, for which there is another clustering of biblical texts reflecting a plague situation.

The biblical passages cited above as well as the extrabiblical sources mentioned can be associated with what has been identified archeologically as a massive disruption of the urbanized life of the petty kingdoms — or kinglets — in Palestine at the end of the Late Bronze Age. City after city suffered violent destruction. In many cases, if not all, the termination of Bronze Age culture in these cities is marked

The Plague Prayer of Mursilis

(Mursilis was a Hittite king, son of the powerful monarch Suppiluliumas; he ruled in Asia Minor during the Amarna Age, Late Bronze IIA. The plague to which the text refers seems to be one which Mursilis' father and his soldiers picked up in a battle against Egyptian forces in southern Syria; they carried the plague back to Hatti-land, where it spread among the populace and became troublesome for years to come, as this prayer indicates.)

What is this ye have done [ye gods]? A plague ye have let into the land. The Hatti land has been cruelly afflicted by the plague. For twenty years now men have been dying since my father's days, in my brother's days, and in mine own since I have become the priest of the gods. When men are dying in the Hatti land like this, the plague is in no wise over. As for me, the agony of my heart and the anguish of my soul I cannot endure any more. . . . The Hatti land was cruelly afflicted. The few people who were left to give sacrificial loaves and libations were dying too. . . . The Hatti land, all of it, is dying. . . . The plowmen who used to work the fields of the god are dead. . . . The grinding women who used to make the sacrificial loaves for the god are dead. . . . O gods, take ye pity on the Hatti land! . . . Look ye upon the Hatti land with favorable eyes, but the evil plague give to [those other] countries.

(taken from *ANET*, pp. 394-96, trans. A. Goetze)

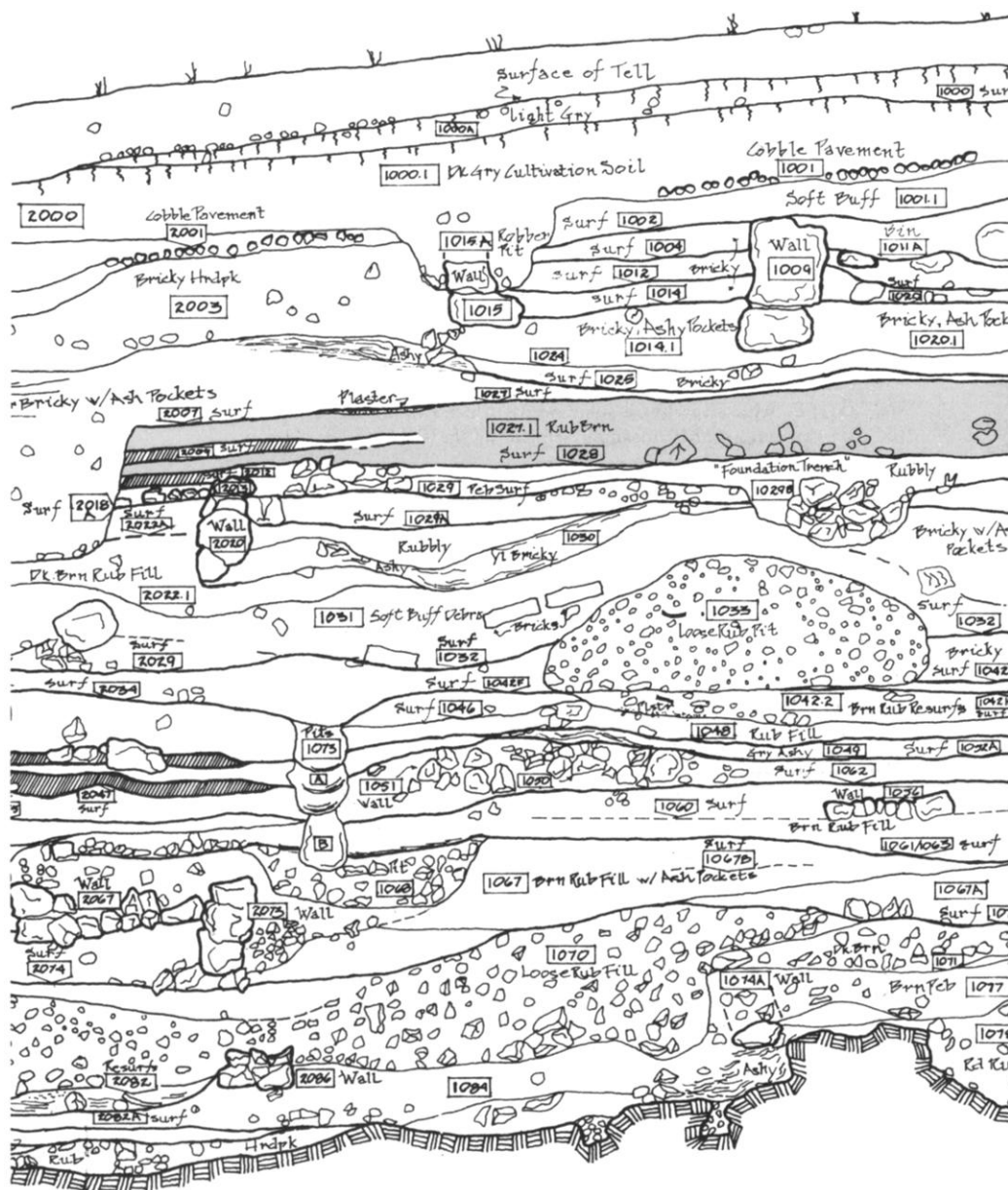
little experience of such epidemics, to grasp the enormity of the plagues and the staggering death tolls which devastated the premodern world. Yet, the effort must be made to comprehend the drastic measures taken to stop epidemics in light of the ancient context.

Recognition of the existence of a period of widespread plague and death at the end of the Late Bronze Age is crucial, because that factor even more than famine and warfare (or at least in combination

Thick burn layer (L. 1027.1 between Surfaces 1027 and 1028) marking the end of the Late Bronze occupation at ancient Gezer. Similar ashen layers have been found at a number of Palestinian tells and generally mark a severe disruption of habitation.

archeologically by a thick layer of ashes, indicating a conflagration of major proportions.

These burnings of cities, it seems, are an aftermath of military conquest or overthrow rather than a part of it. If anything, military conflicts or guerilla warfare took place outside the city walls, so well constructed were the fortifications of the Late Bronze cities. It is quite possible that the widespread burnings were not so much related to military actions as they were to a kind of primitive and desperate public health measure.⁴ The fiery destruction of plagues needed to be fought with fire. Immediately following the recollection of the destructive plague of Baal Peor in Num 31:21-23, the instructions to the Israelite warriors stipulate that "only the gold, the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin, and the lead, everything that can stand the fire, you shall pass through the fire, and it shall be clean. Nevertheless, it shall also be purified with the water of impurity; and whatever cannot stand the fire you shall pass through the water." Thus, the unconscionable *herem*, or utter destruction of cities as presented in the book of Joshua, perhaps can be seen as a kind of plague control. It is difficult in the western world today, with relatively



with those other two evils) created a life situation — or rather a death situation — of monumental proportions. The measures taken within the emergent Israelite community to deal with this situation are the ones that profoundly affected the lives of the female segment of the population.

Plague severely reduced the population of the peasantry at the time when sheer numbers counted most.⁵ The normal difficulties in maintaining rural population in Palestine were compounded dramatically during this period. The

From all perspectives, then, female creativity and labor were highly valued in early Israel. This female worth was not biological exploitation but rather part of the full cooperation of all elements in society in pursuing the goals of the Israelite people. Further, the early Iron Age experience of Israel was within the liberating matrix of the Covenant with Yahweh, which emphasized ethical concerns and sought to maintain all human dignity. The precepts of the Decalogue and the Covenant Code

compensation to the bride's family (Baab 1962a: 283-84), since a daughter contributed through her work to a parent's household. This bride-gift, a kind of reverse dowry, indicates that grooms had to compete for relatively few brides. Likewise, the financial burden of setting up a new household lay with the male, another indication of the socio-economic dimensions of the shortage of brides. The dowry was rarely if ever bestowed in biblical times (Taber 1976: 575). Fathers did not need to entice husbands.

(Compare European history: it is perhaps not until the central Middle Ages that a combination of relative peace and a new urban economy brought about a relative increase in female population and led to the reversal of the terms of marriage. Girls became excess economic burdens and fathers gave dowries and paid for weddings to entice young men to take these girls off their hands [Herlihy 1978: 60].)

Beyond this, however, the intensified need for female participation in working out the Mosaic revolution in the early Israelite period can be seen in the Bible. Looking again at Numbers 31, an exception to the total purge of the

The widespread burnings in the Late Bronze Age may have been in part a desperate public health measure to combat plagues.

biological creativity of females, a matter of vital concern even in normal times because of high infant mortality rates and the often fatal complications of childbearing, was most sorely needed in the aftermath of plagues. The devastation of plague had caused a demographic crisis. The repeated biblical exhortation, "Be fruitful and multiply," is singularly appropriate to this situation.

The strength and solidarity of the family were the basis for the vitality of the restored peasantry in early Israel and its ability to occupy the hill country of Palestine. At the most basic level, Israelite society urgently required a replenishment and even a surge in population to combat the effect of the famine, war, and disease at the end of the Late Bronze Age and to provide the human factor necessary for normal agricultural efforts. Moreover, this need for population increase was intensified as settlement of virgin areas proceeded. In addition to their specifically biological contribution, the full participation of women in the chores of a land-based economy was essential (Friedl 1975: 46-48). Further, since males were called away for occasional military duty in the absence of a standing army, the woman's role in managing all aspects of a household would increase.

are dedicated passionately against the exploitation of any groups of human beings or even animals. The Fifth Commandment (Exod 20:12) bears this out. Both parents are to be honored, for on the two together depends the existence of Israel. The second part of this commandment is not a vague generality but rather an intrinsic complement of the familiar first half of that commandment ("Honor your father and your mother"). It expresses a hope for

The biological creativity of females was important because of high infant mortality, fatal complications of child-bearing, recurrent disease, and the desire to inherit the land.

continued life and a restoration of public well-being: "that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you" (i.e., that life expectancies will stabilize above the low level characteristic of plague epochs).

The Bible generally reflects the fact that there were relatively fewer women of child-bearing age than men of the same age, a condition which Israel shared with the rest of the ancient world. Perhaps the existence of the *mohar*, translated variously as "bride price" or "marriage present," illustrates one way in which the community dealt with a shortage of marriageable women. The *mohar* may be a

Midianite population is to be noted. In addition to the metal objects which were exempt from utter destruction, so too were the "young girls who have not known man by lying with him" (Num 31:18). These captives, however, were not immediately brought into the Israelite camp. Instead, they and their captors were kept outside the camp for seven days in a kind of quarantine period. (Note that the usual incubation period for the kinds of infectious diseases which could conceivably have existed in this situation is two or three to six days [Eickhoff 1977].) Afterward, they thoroughly washed themselves and all their clothing before they

Numbers 31:13-24

(In the aftermath of the wars against the Midianites, Moses discovers that the herem had not been completely carried out; he recalls the devastation at Peor, when some Israelite men had mingled with the daughters of the enemy.)

Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the congregation, went forth to meet them outside the camp. And Moses was angry with the officers of the army. . . . Moses said to them, "Have you let all the women live? Behold, these caused the people of Israel, by the counsel of Balaam, to act treacherously against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the Lord. Now, therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him. But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves. Encamp outside the camp seven days; whoever of you has killed any person, and whoever has touched and slain, purify yourselves and your captives on the third day and on the seventh day. You shall purify every garment, every article of skin, all work of goats' hair, and every article of wood." And Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to battle: "This is the statute of the law which the Lord has commanded Moses: only the gold, the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin, and the lead, everything that can stand the fire, and it shall be clean. Nevertheless, it shall also be purified with the water of impurity; and whatever cannot stand the fire, you shall pass through the water. You must wash your clothes on the seventh day; and afterward you shall come into the camp."

entered the camp. This incident is hardly an expression of lascivious male behavior; rather, it reflects the desperate need for women of child-bearing age, a need so extreme that the utter destruction of the Midianite foes — and the prevention of death by plague — as required by the law of the *herem* could be waived in the interest of sparing the young women. The Israelites weighed the life-death balance, and the need for females of child-bearing age took precedence.

Such a source of female population, however, was not to be regularized. Instead, the extraordinary needs for female reproductive power in the tribal period precipitated strong sanctions against the expending of sexual energy in ways that either detracted from the primary reproductive channels or interfered with the strengths of nuclear family life or the transmission of family-based land ownership. The whole array of sexual customs and rules which exist in the Bible and which had the ultimate effect of relegating women to a narrowed and eventually subordinate position in later biblical

times are in many cases radical changes from what had existed previously in the ancient world. These changes, which limited human sexual contacts and options, must be reconsidered in light of the demographic crisis of early Israel. Sanctions that eventually became expressed in biblical laws dealing with incest, rape, adultery, virginity, bestiality, exogamy, homosexuality, and prostitution require reexamination and reevaluation within the dynamics of the socio-economic situation (Friedl 1975: 86-98) and human crisis of the earliest days of Israel. The dimension of purity and polemic in sexual sanctions is not to be ignored; but the role of the concern for repopulation and the need for human resources must also enter the picture.⁶

This is a vast project and one which is beyond the scope of this paper. However, progress can tentatively begin by looking at one expression of sexuality and the way the societal pressures of ancient Israel transformed it. Harlotry is a good example, since it leads directly to considering the second major issue which effected the turnabout in

the status of women in ancient society.

Until the period of the Judges, the existence of harlotry was an accepted, if not condoned, fact (Baab 1962b: 932). Courtesans and prostitutes have existed at least since the dawn of recorded history without accompanying moral judgment or moral condemnation of harlotry *per se*. It was a legitimate though not necessarily desirable occupation for some women. In the Genesis story of Judah and Tamar, Tamar is not condemned for her temporary identification as a prostitute nor is Judah condemned for lying with her, except insofar as it signaled an evasion of his responsibilities toward his sons' widow (Genesis 38). Similarly, Rahab the harlot of Jericho is actually a heroine who helped the Israelite spies, in return for which they spared the destruction of her family (Joshua 2 and 6).

By the time that biblical legislation records attitudes toward harlotry, a considerable change had occurred. Lev 19:29 is explicit: "Do not profane your daughter by making her a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry and the land fall into wickedness." A father was responsible in the patriarchal system for his daughters. He was to limit their choice of occupation. Prostitution was not a possibility. The priorities and values of early Israelite existence had made family-centered life the chief, if not the only, course of action for a young woman.

There was another reason for closing out the option of harlotry in early Israel beside the need to have all available women of child-bearing years integrated into self-sufficient families. Harlotry was closely associated with the special use of sexual energy involved in ritual or cultic prostitution in the nature religions of the ruling urban elites. The efforts to secure productivity in the Israelite village and rural settings were to be separated from the rituals of the fertility cults. The sexual fetishism of Late Bronze Age

society was "integrated into the hierarchic social order" (Gottwald 1975b: 53). Because Israel rejected that order and also rejected the magical and mythological associations between the human reproductive process and the ritual enactment of such process, it of necessity prohibited the involvement of cult functionaries, male or female (Deut 23:17), in such sexual activity.

In biblical law, the particular emphasis on the dissociation of the priests from harlotry can only be understood in this context. In Lev 21:7, 14-15, priests are commanded to marry virgins. They are forbidden to marry any of four categories of

The traditional answer to the query as to why the priesthood is male no doubt would have invoked the notion that the anthropomorphizing tendencies in the Bible made God out to be a male deity, some sort of macho warrior at one end or loving father at the other end. Male deities would naturally require a male priesthood. This response, however, does not account for the nonsexuality and non-humanity of Yahweh's unity. Gender-oriented language for Yahweh is metaphoric. Furthermore, in addition to the all-too-familiar andromorphic images of Yahweh, there are a multitude of gyno-

as some economic surplus. The possibility of female service within any sort of cultic context could be eliminated purely on the basis of the felt priorities of early Israel in its allocation of human energies. Female energies were desperately needed in the family setting.

Partially as a rejection of the mythological and cultic sexuality of prebiblical religion and its integral connection with the urban power centers, and partly under pressures to concentrate female energies within the home and family, the Israelite priesthood emerged as a male occupation. In ancient Israel, thousands and thousands of years of female participation in this most crucial of all public institutions, an organized cultus, were terminated. One might speculate as to whether or not women might have entered priestly roles once the demographic crisis had been alleviated were it not for the continued attraction of the nature religions, particularly after the establishment of the monarchy and the return to urbanized life as the dominant mode in Israel. Thereafter, the social sanctions against such occupations as harlotry achieved the status of divine laws governing a priesthood distinct from that of pagan religion. From that situation, the moral judgment upon this kind of female sexual activity outside the family was only a step away.

Two major factors, then, appear to be primary causes of the

The tight channeling of female energies into domestic affairs, part of the liberating event of Israel's formation, ultimately became the reason for the ideology of female inferiority.

women (widows, divorcees, "defiled" women, and harlots) whose sexual energies may already have been somewhat dissipated and whose fitness for child-bearing may have been reduced. Harlots in this law are not singled out as detestable or illegal members of society at large. However, in the same passage, the daughters of priests are condemned to burning by fire should they play the harlot (v 9). This extraordinarily strong penalty for prostitution is aimed specifically at women who lived near or in the Israelite sanctuary area, the daughters of priests. It indicates the danger of pagan cultic expression that existed when men and women were together in cultic contexts, a danger that to some extent necessitated the removal of one of the two sexes from cultic services.

In the Bible, it is apparent which sex was barred from cultic leadership, but the reasons for such a limitation have not been properly explored. The priesthood of the Old Testament represents a radical break with the nature of priesthoods in the history of the ancient world; the priesthood of biblical religion is, from the outset, portrayed as a strictly and absolutely male profession.

morphic images, once one is open to reading them as such (Trible 1973: 31-35).

Still, the establishment of an exclusively male priesthood was in a sense a natural development at the end of the 2nd millennium. While a few millennia earlier a female priesthood in service of the Great Mother might have been the paradigm, the urban social systems of the Bronze Age were male dominated. Male deities outnumbered the goddesses. Thus, the kings, priest-kings, and priests were the dominant figures and provided the models for early Israel.

During the establishment of the monarchy and gradual reurbanization, women diminished in social importance.

The priesthood before the monarchy was no doubt a decentralized and purposefully limited factor in Israelite life (Cody 1969: 1-61). The egalitarian economy of the reestablished peasantry of the period of the Judges rejected the bureaucratic concentration of wealth that an elaborate priesthood requires. Circumscribed as it may have been, a priesthood nevertheless was established and thus siphoned off some portion of manpower as well

profound change that occurred in the status and role of women during premonarchic Israel. The first was the drastic need to concentrate human energy, male and female, into family life and into intensive cultivation of the land, including considerable new territory. This meant a sex ethic, the primary societal function of which was to make childbirth and sexuality within the family crucial societal goals. Reversing the devastating depopu-

lation of the Late Bronze Age was an enormous task. Likewise, setting about to reemphasize an agricultural economy and even to settle new lands was a highly ambitious goal which called for the labor of women alongside men. The second factor was the rejection of pagan deities in favor of a covenant with a unified Yahweh. In cultic terms, this translated into a male priesthood. Neither of these two factors *within their contemporary settings* was particularly exploitive of male or female. On the contrary, strong female involvement in an agricultural economy and in the birth of new generations of Israelites who would literally inherit the land meant that women and men worked together to achieve the covenant ideals.

It is indeed an irony of history, then, that this very tight channeling of female (and male) energies into domestic affairs, which was a liberating event in its own time, became, ultimately, the *raison d'être* for continued and exclusive confinement of female energies to that sphere. A functional restriction to meet a demographic crisis of

critical proportions became so deeply engrained that with the passing of the crisis the restrictions remained and ultimately became the basis for ideologies of female inferiority and subordination. Once the pattern of female nonparticipation in other spheres of life — the priesthood in particular — became established, society adhered to it in ways that became limiting and oppressive to women.

This was particularly true with the establishment of the monarchy and a gradual movement toward urbanization. Women became less important as participants in economic survival and therefore diminished in social importance. They were also the first to suffer when urban centers drained off the productivity of the land to support the monarchy and the military. Hard work under conditions of increased population and reduced nutrition meant even greater risks of death in childbirth. The introduction of slave wives under the phenomenal growth of the Davidic empire no doubt also contributed to the reduced importance of women. Thus, it was likely

during the monarchy that the functional restriction of women in society became transformed gradually into an ideological restriction.

By this time opportunities for women to assume important roles outside the family, possibilities which had previously existed in ancient Near Eastern societies, especially in aristocratic settings, had been more or less systematically cut off in order to meet the needs of the emerging tribal groups. Yet, the exceptional leadership of women such as Miriam, Deborah, and the wise women of Tekoa and Abel are not so much "dynamic remnants" (Trible 1976: 965) of a time when women could hold natural positions of leadership within a community, positions which would have been based in inherited power structures (as queens or noblewomen); rather, their existence gives testimony to an

North Syrian cylinder seal of the LB II period. The seal depicts a bearded hero facing a goddess with uplifted hands and a man with a scimitar facing a female (priestess?) also with raised hands.



epoch of liberation in which stratified hereditary leadership was abolished and anyone, women included, could rise to irregular positions of authority. They thus testify to the notion that God's spirit or wisdom could rest upon any individual, male or female, and grant that person a certain role in the community based on personal gifts rather than on social status. However, the patriarchal structuring of egalitarian tribal life with males as heads of families and of clans, with the elders of Israel becoming leaders, meant that women did not participate regularly in any sort of public political life, just as they did not perform priestly duties. The famous biblical women just enumerated occupy a kind of exceptional position, a nonrecurring charismatic participation. It is important to recognize that, however limited in proportion to males such leadership may have been, it was thoroughly accepted and acceptable. No notion of female inferiority intruded.

The reality for most women in the biblical world during the

monarchy was one in which the vigorous equal-participation momentum of the formative period had been transformed gradually into a kind of masculine domination and female subordination. However, various biblical texts (Trible 1973) which depict a kind of harmonious ideal or balance between the sexes preserve the premonarchic situation. The Creation chapters of Genesis are one such text. Both the Priestly account in Genesis 1 ("So God created mankind in his image, . . . male and female he created them. And God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it' [i.e., till it together]"; Gen 1:27-28) and the Yahwistic narrative in Genesis 2 affirm the existence of two sexes as the necessary and equal balance in human life.

In addition to the creation stories, the Song of Songs presents a beautiful picture of human love. The maiden and lad share in their desire and love for the other and in their expression of that love. Ideas of subordination or inferiority of one

or the other are absent.

Also, the very anthropomorphism of Yahweh, when it is expressed in feminine terms, reaffirms and encourages the female in society. God, the warrior, is only half of the Exodus event. God, the provider of food and water, sustains the refugees from Egypt until they reach arable land. The redemptive acts of Yahweh, to be sure, are neither masculine nor feminine, but the working out of those actions involved the might that masculine imagery expresses and also the love and caring — and even the giving birth — that feminine imagery conveys.

These latter, then, are the biblical ideals which can provide the balance in the endeavor to sort out the realities of life for women in ancient Israel amidst the social changes through which it passed. One can wonder to what extent these ideals were constantly at work within biblical society itself, even as the course of women's participation in society was being altered for millennia to come.

NOTES

¹The social history approach is exemplified by the work of such scholars as Mendenhall (1962; 1973; 1976a; 1976b), Gottwald (1975a; 1975b), and Campbell (1975), especially for the period of concern in this paper, premonarchic Israel. A forthcoming article by Chaney in *Biblical Archeologist* contains a comprehensive presentation and documentation of this approach ("Ancient Palestinian Peasant Movements and the Formation of Premonarchic Israel").

²A purely ideological understanding of this rejection is problematic, since it is related to some extent to the military-political and also the economic situation of post-Mosaic Israel. Further, the notion of tribal orientation is, at least for some scholars (Gottwald 1975a: 93-95), actually a "retribalization" based on long-standing tribal patterns.

³The difficulties inherent in the task of deducing population fluctuations in antiquity are not to be minimized, as Petersen (1975) makes clear. Nonetheless, the recurrent patterns visible in tomb studies and skeletal analyses for various parts of the premodern world do allow certain qualified judgments.

⁴Similar extreme and seemingly cruel action in restricting homes or districts or even whole towns afflicted by the plague is well documented in European history. Instead of the healthy removing themselves from infected situations, the infected areas were isolated. Houses and sometimes entire towns were boarded up or walled in, along with all the inhabitants, sick or healthy. Nearly all of the latter

then perished along with the former as a result of the disease itself or from suffocation or starvation. See Hare 1953: 150-52.

⁵Archeological evidence bears out the literary evidence, both biblical and extrabiblical, for a massive disruption at the end of the Late Bronze Age (cf. Mendenhall 1976a). Studies of deaths, longevity, reproductive capacity, ecology, and population density in the east Mediterranean have provided an estimated dramatic drop-off in people per square kilometer (km²) from 30 in the Late Bronze Age, a high point for all of the Bronze Age, to 19 or probably less per km² in the Iron I period. In other words, the Iron Age begins with an overall reduction in population of over 1/3, with some scholars positing as high as a 4/5 reduction. See Angel 1972: 93 and Table 28.

⁶Anthropological analyses of the roles of women and men in various types of agrarian economies provide an untapped and potentially very fruitful resource for reconstructing the roles of various family members in early Israel. Particularly as archeology provides more and more information about Iron I agricultural techniques and crop selection and also about cultural and/or commercial isolation, comparative studies will aid in the delineation of the family basis of Israelite society. It is indeed likely, as Friedl explains (1975: 100), that "social structures and attitudes toward sex are together a consequence of strategies of control developed, sometimes unconsciously, by members of society as a means of regulating the ratio of land and food resources to the population."

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Reconstructing Meaning in Deuteronomy 22:5: Gender, Society, and Transvestitism in Israel and the Ancient Near East

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Deuteronomy 22:5, the Hebrew Bible's anti-transvestitism clause, has long presented translators and scholars with difficulty.¹ The verse reads as follows:

לא־יִהְיֶה כְּלִי־גִבֹר עַל־אִשָּׁה וְלֹא־יִלְבֹּשׁ גִּבֹר שְׂמֹלֶת אִשָּׁה כִּי תִוְעַבֵּת יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ כְּלִי־עֵשָׂה אִלָּה

Although scholars are in general agreement on the translation (if not the exact meaning) of *תועבת יהוה*, the struggle to understand *כלי־גבר* is evident in the vagueness of our translations,² a sampling of which follow (the renderings of *כלי־גבר* appear in *italics*):

A woman must not put on *man's apparel*, nor shall a man wear woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord your God. (NJPS)

No woman shall wear an *article of man's clothing*, nor shall a man put on woman's dress; for those who do these things are abominable to the Lord your God. (NEB)

The woman shall not wear *that which pertaineth unto a man*, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination to the LORD thy God. (KJV)

A woman shall not wear *anything that pertains to a man*, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God. (RSV)

¹ Samuel R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), 250–51.

² *Ibid.*, 251.

A woman must not wear a *man's apparel*, nor may a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does these things is repugnant to Yahweh your God.³

The broader context of the verse is of little help. While it is common in ancient Near Eastern law codes for the laws to be arranged topically, sometimes providing insight into the meaning of a particular provision, Deut 22:5 lacks such a clear context.⁴ It occurs between a set of commands to assist one's neighbor in matters of animal husbandry and other property (22:1–4) and rules governing the treatment of birds and the use of their eggs for food (22:6–7), followed by a law requiring the construction of a parapet on a house to prevent an accidental fall and the blood-guilt that this might bring (22:8). Only in Deut 22:9–10 are there prohibitions against mixing (of agricultural seed, the types of animals used in plowing, and mixed-fiber garments) that might be considered similar to 22:5.

Another approach is clearly required. In this study I argue that the meaning of Deut 22:5 can be better determined by first understanding the social nature of transvestitism itself (both in the ancient Near East and in other areas and periods), and then by examining the specific meanings of the words chosen by the biblical author for this verse, particularly the terms *תועבת יהוה* and *כליגבר*. The evidence indicates that Deut 22:5 prohibits a particular type of cultic activity found in other cultures of the ancient Near East, and that the use of *גבר* rather than *איש* for “man” illustrates an important nuance in the Israelite conception of masculinity.⁵ A reading of the verse in relation to transvestitism in cultures outside of ancient Israel or the ancient Near East is not supported.

I. THE STRUCTURE OF DEUTERONOMY 22:5

Deuteronomy 22:5 can be broken down into three parts. Two of these are primary, divided by the Masoretes with an *atnakh*, which are designated in the following table with the numbers 1 and 2. The first section can then be further divided into two parallel sections, divided by a conjunctive 1, designated 1a and 1b:

³ Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 262.

⁴ For a discussion of the organizing principles of biblical and Mesopotamian law codes, see Raymond Westbrook, *Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Law* (CahRB 26; Paris: Gabalda, 1988), 1–8.

⁵ The cultic comparison has been made by several scholars; see the discussions in Harry A. Hoffner, “Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity: Their Use in Ancient Near Eastern Sympathetic Magic Rituals,” *JBL* 85 (1966): 326–34; W. H. P. Römer, “Randbemerkungen zur Travestie von Deut. 22, 5,” in *Travels in the World of the Old Testament: Studies Presented to Professor M. A. Beek* (ed. M. S. H. G. Heerma van Voss et al.; SSN 16; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), 217–22; William W. Hallo, “Biblical Abominations and Sumerian Taboos,” *JQR* n.s. 76 (1985): 21–40; and idem, *The Book of the People* (BJS 225; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 98.

1a	לא־יהיה כלי־גבר על־אשה	There shall not be a <i>kēli-geber</i> upon an <i>ʾiṣṣā</i>
1b	ולא־ילבש גבר שמלת אשה	and a <i>geber</i> shall not wear a garment for an <i>ʾiṣṣā</i>
2	כי תועבת יהוה אלהיך כל־עשה אלה	for whoever does this is an abomination to Yahweh your God.

The basic meaning of the text is as follows: two categories of person are given, each prohibited from contact with an item associated with the other (part 1). Violating this separation is regarded as offensive in some way to Yahweh (part 2).

The text of section 1b is anchored by two well-understood words: the verb ילבש (“he will wear”) and the noun שמלה (“cloak, wrapper, mantle, garment”). A שמלה is literally a “cover,” and it is noteworthy that the word can refer not just to clothing but also a cloth that covers a sleeping person (Gen 9:23) or an inanimate object (Exod 12:34).⁶ A translation of “garment” in Deut 22:5 is justified, however, because of the verb; the root /LBŠ/ is common in Semitic languages, with the meaning “to put on, wear, be clothed.”⁷ The fact that the words אשה and גבר unquestionably refer to some type of person of each gender (which I will consider in more detail below) further supports a conclusion that section 1b prohibits some form of transvestitism.

Section 1a clearly parallels section 1b, but can we conclude that, like 1b, it bans the wearing of clothing of the opposite gender, as has generally been supposed? Traditionally, the two categories described in 1a and 1b have been defined simply as “man” (גבר) and “woman” (אשה), but if simple garment-related cross-dressing was all that the text intended to address, why use the word כלי instead of שמלה in association with גבר? Why use two different verbs to describe what is not to be done (1a: לא־יהיה; 1b: לא־ילבש) if the actions being banned are identical for both the גבר and the אשה? Obviously something more is going on.

Section 2 explains why the activities in sections 1a and 1b are prohibited. This part of the text presents no real difficulties in basic word meanings but rather problems of interpretation, notably the term תועבת יהוה.

II. TRANSVESTITISM AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON

Transvestitism is often simply defined as the practice of one gender wearing clothing specifically designated as exclusive to the other. Gender-specific objects or

⁶ HALOT, 1337–38; BDB, 971.

⁷ HALOT, 519–20; BDB, 527. Cognates for the root /LBŠ/ appear in Akkadian, Arabic, Aramaic, Ethiopic and Ugaritic.

garments are part of the larger concept of gender roles, which form a basic feature of one's place in society. While it is not difficult to imagine someone wearing the garments of a different gender for purely practical reasons (a man wearing a woman's coat to survive in a blizzard, for example), such circumstances are not likely to be viewed as transvestitism. The etymology of the term "transvestite" itself implies some sort of crossing between categories, and, in most cases, the decision to wear an article of clothing or use an object specific to another gender is done with the intention of mimicking that gender in some way.⁸ In his study of the sociology of transvestites and transsexuals, Dave King remarks that many scholars and physicians view transgender behaviors as psychological conditions existing apart from cultural and historical contexts, and that in their view "science has simply discovered what is given in nature." He adds, however, that this approach is problematic:

But it is also possible to view the categories of transvestite and transsexual and their respective "isms" as historically and culturally specific *constructions*. Thus the meanings which cross-dressing and sex-changing have in our culture are rendered problematic and contingent rather than being taken for granted as representing "reality." Apparently similar phenomena in other cultures and at other times cannot simply be subsumed under our own categories but must be viewed within their own cultural contexts; contexts which do not simply provide different settings for the same phenomenon but which actually form part of the phenomenon itself. In this view science is not simply discovering the phenomenon but is involved in its creation.⁹

In other words, like gender roles in general, transvestitism is a cultural construct built atop a biological reality. The physical existence of male and female is assigned meaning by society, and this meaning will manifest itself in both objects and activities. These can vary widely and have a direct and important impact on both the decision to cross-dress and how it is done.

King provides three examples of transvestite behavior from three different cultures to illustrate his point: the homosexual "Mollies Clubs" from London in the seventeenth century, the "Nadle" of the Native American Navajo of New Mexico, and the modern Western transvestite.¹⁰ In each case the transvestites act according to a social script that varies widely between examples. The cross-dressers

⁸ The origin of the related word "travesty" also lies in cross-dressing. See the discussion in Römer, "Randbemerkungen zur Travestie," 219–22; and Hallo, *Book of the People*, 98.

⁹ Dave King, *The Transvestite and the Transsexual: Public Categories and Private Identities* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1993), 3 (emphasis in original).

¹⁰ Ibid., 7–9. For the "Mollies Clubs," see E. Ward, *The Secret History of the London Clubs* (London: J. Dutton, 1709; repr., 1896), 5; and Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (2nd ed.; London: Gay Men's Press, 1995), 86–88. For the Nadle, see W. W. Hill, "The Status of the Hermaphrodite and Transvestite in Navaho Culture," *American Anthropologist* n.s. 37 (1935): 273–79. For the modern Western transvestite, see Richard F. Docter, *Transvestites and Transsexuals: Toward a Theory of Cross-Gender Behavior* (New York: Plenum, 1988).

of the Mollies Clubs mimicked what they believed to be typical female behavior, with a focus on such things as gossip about (in this case imaginary) husbands and children, trying to bring English customs of the day into their subculture.¹¹ The Navajo Nadle actually refers to two types of people: hermaphrodites (which probably refers to people born with ambiguous genitalia), who are regarded as the “true” Nadle, and transvestites of both genders, who are said to be pretending to be a Nadle. Indeterminate gender is respected in Navajo culture, and the Nadle are regarded as bringers of good fortune who in the mythic past supported the supremacy of men. This high status is sought by the transvestite Nadle.¹²

The modern Western transvestite presents an interesting distribution of data. Males dressing as females have been widely studied in psychological literature, but females dressing as males much less so.¹³ Western men who cross-dress include homosexual drag queens and female impersonators, both primary and secondary transsexuals, and fetishistic heterosexual transvestites.¹⁴ Except for primary transsexuals (whose interest is not in dressing as the opposite sex but in physically *being* the opposite sex), a strong cultural element is central to the behavior. Richard F. Docter traces the development of male heterosexual transvestitism from an early childhood fetish to partial cross-dressing reinforced by sexual pleasure in adolescence, which then, in adulthood, often moves into complete cross-dressing and the assumption of a female “cross-gender identity” that either stabilizes as subordinate to the transvestite’s male identity or in rare cases progresses to secondary transsexualism.¹⁵ Docter hypothesizes the causes of this behavior as follows:

First, is learning about one’s gender, including the rules and behaviors demanded within a given society and social group. Second, is learning to be envious of the opposite gender. This is the view that women have a life easier and better than men. While gender envy cannot explain all cross dressing behavior, it has been extensively cited as a factor in the development of cross-gender behavior. Third, is learning that women’s clothing, especially intimate apparel, is “forbidden fruit” for males in our culture. Our socialization may somehow contribute to making such clothing especially erotic in the eyes of young boys.¹⁶

Culture, in other words, is a primary factor in the psychological development of the fetishistic male transvestite, but what is equally important for our purposes is that the “cross-gender identity” that emerges with this phenomenon is manifested through Western cultural ideas about gender roles.

Social factors also explain why women cross-dress as men. Female transvestitism is usually focused on the desire to gain male opportunity and status in

¹¹ Bray, *Renaissance England*, 88.

¹² Hill, “Navaho Culture,” 273–76.

¹³ Docter, *Transvestites and Transsexuals*, 12–13.

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, 9–38, for a more detailed discussion of these categories.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 201–15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 222–23.

cultures where roles for women are restricted (I term this phenomenon “opportunistic female transvestitism”). For this reason female transvestitism is often seen as an effort by women to “improve” themselves by becoming more like men, and it lacks the social stigma attached to male cross-dressing, which is considered a deliberate and irrational willingness to reduce one’s social status.¹⁷ During the Middle Ages women who disguised themselves as men were generally tolerated and even encouraged, particularly when they sought to cross-dress for religious reasons and provided they did not impose themselves too much on male roles (as Joan of Arc did, which resulted in her execution).¹⁸ In other periods the same pattern remains, with examples of women passing as men in such traditionally masculine roles as soldier and sailor.¹⁹ As modern women are more and more able to assume these roles without having to disguise their female gender, along with an increased tolerance of women wearing types of clothing previously reserved for men, the prevalence of female transvestitism in the West has declined, leaving primary transsexuals and certain homosexuals as the most common groups of female cross-dressers. Indeed, in modern Western culture it is only with effort that a woman can be viewed as a cross-dresser at all. Like opportunistic female transvestites, neither transsexual women nor homosexual women generally find male clothing particularly erotic, and this lack of a sexual motive for female transvestitism is an added reason for the greater tolerance of it in Western society, which has a difficult and often hostile attitude toward sexual matters in general.²⁰

III. TRANSVESTITISM IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

To understand Deut 22:5, we must therefore understand the social meanings of transvestitism and gender roles in ancient Israel and the ancient Near East. Since our section 1b does prohibit cross-dressing of some kind, and since our section 2 describes it as a תועבת יהוה, establishing the precise meaning of this latter term provides a good starting point for such an understanding.

In general, both the word תועבה and the term תועבת יהוה can refer to either an ethical offense or a cultic offense, so it is important to determine which sort is

¹⁷ Vern L. Bullough, “Transvestites in the Middle Ages,” *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (1974): 1381–94; Charlotte Suthrell, *Unzipping Gender: Sex, Cross-dressing and Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 26.

¹⁸ Bullough, “Middle Ages,” 1390.

¹⁹ See the cases in C. J. S. Thompson, *The Mysteries of Sex: Women Who Posed as Men and Men Who Impersonated Women* (New York: Causeway Books, 1974).

²⁰ For the rare examples of fetishistic cross-dressing in women, see Robert J. Stoller, “Transvestism in Women,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 11 (1982): 99–115, esp. 111–12, on the question of the erotic value of male clothing among female homosexuals. On the hostility of Western society toward sexuality, see Suthrell, *Unzipping Gender*, 124.

being described here.²¹ As a rule we may describe an ethical violation as one in which the action of the perpetrator harms another person, while a cultic violation breaks a rule of purity or ritual specific to the practice of the cult. In the ancient Near East both were considered offensive to the gods.²²

There is little evidence of transvestitism elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible or in other material from ancient Israel,²³ but evidence of both transgender behavior and/or mythology does exist in the neighboring cultures of Canaan, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. From Egypt the most famous example is the Pharaoh Hatshepsut (ca. 1478/72–1458 B.C.E.), who, after seizing power, had herself depicted with such male (and pharaonic) features as a beard, male kilt, and crown. Representations of her body show that of a man, lacking female breasts.²⁴ Although there was no specific reason why a woman could not be pharaoh—and Hatshepsut was not the first woman to take the throne (the last ruler of the Twelfth Dynasty, Sobeknofru, was a woman), Hatshepsut's assumption of masculine traits and iconography was exceptional.²⁵ In addition to Hatshepsut, there is evidence that transgender behavior occurred at the court of Akhenaten (1353–1336 B.C.E.), where the king is often depicted with feminine hips and his wife Nefertiti with the crown normally reserved for the pharaoh; the meaning of this iconography is still unclear.²⁶

We have more references to the actual practice of cross-dressing from Canaan and Mesopotamia, virtually all of it in cultic settings, and there are numerous terms for individuals whose gender does not appear to have been specifically male or female, including *assinnu*, *kulu'u*, and *kurgarrû* in Akkadian and *sag-ur-sag*, *gala*, and *pi-li-pi-li* in Sumerian.²⁷ Much of the activity of these individuals revolved around the worship of Ashtarte and Inanna/Ištar, and one of the better-known epithets for Ištar was “the one who can change woman into man and man into

²¹ HALOT, 1702–4; BDB, 1072–73. The term תועבת יהוה first appears in Deuteronomy (HALOT, 1703), and most of the references to this expression are clearly cultic, e.g., Deut 12:31; 17:1; 23:19; 27:25. A few are ethical, however, e.g., 25:15–16. Further appearances of this term are discussed in Otto Bächli, *Israel und die Völker: Eine Studie zum Deuteronomium* (ATANT 41; Zurich: Zwingli, 1962), 53–55.

²² See the discussion of this distinction in Hallo, “Biblical Abominations,” 21–40; and idem, *Book of the People*, 97–99.

²³ Suthrell, *Unzipping Gender*, 126.

²⁴ Joyce Tyldesley, *Egypt's Golden Empire: The Age of the New Kingdom* (London: Headline, 2001), 59.

²⁵ Ibid., 63.

²⁶ Lise Manniche, *Sexual Life in Ancient Egypt* (London: Kegan Paul, 2002), 25–27.

²⁷ Transgender behavior often appears in ritual contexts in the ancient world; see Will Roscoe, “Priests of the Goddess: Gender Transgression in Ancient Religion,” *HR* 35 (1996): 195–230. For a discussion of the numerous titles for individuals with unusual sexual roles in the Mesopotamian cult, see Richard A. Henshaw, *Female and Male: The Cultic Personnel: The Bible and the Rest of the Ancient Near East* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series 31; Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1994), 284–311.

woman.”²⁸ This gender ambiguity appears in numerous ritual texts of Inanna/Ištar: a hymn to Inanna from the reign of Iddin-Dagan of Isin (1974–1954 B.C.E.), for example, describes a procession that includes the sag-ur-sag, whom Daniel Reisman describes as male prostitutes.²⁹ Gwendolyn Leick, however, contends that these are individuals with ambiguous genitalia who were accepted into Mesopotamian society by assigning them an unusual gender role.³⁰ The sag-ur-sag carry symbols of both genders and dress as both as well (lines 60–63a):

a₂-zi-da-bi-a tug₂-nita₂ bi₂-in-mu₄
 ku₃-^dInanna-ra igi-ni-še₃ i₃-dib-be₂
 nin-gal-an-na ^dInanna-ra silim-ma ga-na-ab-be₂-en
 a₂-gub₃-bu-bi-a tug₂-nam-mi₂ mu-ni-si-ig
 ku₃-^dInanna-ra igi-ni-še₃ i₃-dib-be₂

They adorn their right side with the clothing of women.
 They walk before pure Inanna.
 I would cry “Hail!” to Inanna, the great lady.
 They place the clothing of men on their left side.
 They walk before pure Inanna.³¹

It is difficult to call the sag-ur-sag transvestites, since their original sex is nowhere clearly stated in this text. Rather than the transition from one gender to the other, perhaps they embody the duality of gender that Inanna/Ištar represents. However, the sag-ur-sag are followed by what to the Mesopotamians would probably have been true transvestites: young men carrying hoops (a female symbol), and young women who seem to be carrying weapons (a male symbol).³² Apart from their challenge to traditional Mesopotamian gender roles, the precise meaning of this and similar activities remains unclear. Richard A. Henshaw concludes that these rituals are acting out in dramatic form the power of Inanna to change a

²⁸ For the activities of transgendered individuals, see Römer, “Randbemerkungen zur Travestie,” 217–22. Ištar’s power to change a person’s gender is discussed in Gwendolyn Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994), 159.

²⁹ For a detailed discussion of ritual texts relating to Ištar, see Brigitte R. M. Groneberg, *Lob der Ištar: Gebet und Ritual an die altbabylonische Venusgöttin: Tanatti Ištar* (Cuneiform Monographs 8; Groningen: Styx, 1997). The ritual that includes the sag-ur-sag is discussed in Daniel Reisman, “Iddin-Dagan’s Sacred Marriage Hymn,” *JCS* 25 (1973): 185–202; the full text was published by W. H. P. Römer, *Sumerische ‘Königshymnen’ der Isin-Zeit* (Documenta et monumenta Orientis antiqui 13; Leiden: Brill, 1965).

³⁰ Leick, *Sex and Eroticism*, 158–59.

³¹ Text from Römer, *Sumerische ‘Königshymnen,’* 130; and Daniel Reisman, “Two Neo-Sumerian Royal Hymns” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1969), 151–52.

³² Lines 68–73 (Leick, *Sex and Eroticism*, 159). The significance of symbols in relation to gender in the ancient Near East has been described by Hoffner (“Symbols,” 326–34). I will consider his conclusions below.

person's gender, while S. M. Maul has argued that those with uncertain gender were thought to be able to enter trancelike states and serve as a conduit between the living and the dead; he pays particular attention to this role in the composition *The Descent of Ištar*.³³

For our purposes, what is most noteworthy is the fact that the cross-dressing described in these texts occurs specifically in the context of the cult, although the titles of these individuals also appear in economic texts in association with names, which means that they must have also had a noncultic social meaning much like any profession.³⁴ We have no evidence, however, that any of these individuals cross-dressed or otherwise exhibited transgender behavior in noncultic contexts. It is clear that in the normal gender ideology of ancient Near Eastern cultures, male and female roles were sharply defined and fixed.³⁵

The idea that Mesopotamian transvestitism was institutionalized for only a limited number of cultic functionaries and contexts, and not in the broader society, is supported by the anthropology of transvestitism itself. Anthropologists originally hypothesized that societies with rigid gender distinctions would be more likely to create transvestite gender roles as a way for males in particular to escape the sometimes difficult and demanding criteria of their gender role (as seems to have been the case with the Berdache of the highly militarized Native American tribes of North America), but Robert L. Munroe et al. have shown that more often the opposite is true, that societies with rigid gender roles are less likely to have institutionalized transvestitism than those where the cultural difference between male and female is less distinct.³⁶ So while transvestites exist in societies with a strict division of gender, their behavior is generally taboo.

We must therefore consider the question of whether transvestitism in the ancient Near East was acceptable in some circumstances but not in others, just as male transvestitism is tolerated at Halloween but not at other times in our own culture. The small amount of evidence that does exist for nonritual types of cross-dressing in Mesopotamia may bear this out: the Babylonian adage about the man and his wife switching roles, for example, seems to have no cultic meaning and may

³³ Henshaw, *Female and Male*, 294. S. M. Maul, "kurgarrû und assinnu und ihr Stand in der babylonischen Gesellschaft," in *Außenseiter und Randgruppen* (ed. V. Haas; Konstanzer Althis-torische Vorträge und Forschungen 32; Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, 1992), 159–71.

³⁴ Henshaw, *Female and Male*, 306.

³⁵ See Marten Stol, "Private Life in Mesopotamia," in *CANE* 1: 485–501, esp. 490–91.

³⁶ For the Berdache, see E. A. Hoebel, *Man in the Primitive World* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1949), 459; and Donald G. Forgey, "The Institution of Berdache Among the North American Plains Indians," *Journal of Sex Research* 11 (1975): 1–15, esp. 9–14. The appearance of trans-vestitism relative to the rigidity of gender roles has been studied by Robert L. Munroe, John W. M. Whiting, and David J. Hally, "Institutionalized Male Transvestism and Sex Distinctions," *Ameri-can Anthropologist* n.s. 71 (1969): 87–91.

instead be presenting marital sex play.³⁷ The first four lines have been restored as follows:

[a]-*hur-ru-u₂*
 [a-n]a DAM-*šu i-qab-bi*
 [at]-*ti lu eṭ-lu*
 [a-na-k]u lu ar-da-tu

The [coarse] man said to his wife: "May [you] be the young man! May [I] be the young woman!"³⁸

The first line of the text has been treated as either [a]-*hur-ru-u₂* ("a coarse, boorish man") or [a]-*mur-ru-u₂* ("Amorite").³⁹ Given that the text has a Middle Assyrian date, a reference to an Amorite seems less likely, since that ethnic group appears mostly in texts from the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods.⁴⁰ If, on the other hand, the text is describing a coarse person, this may indicate that purely sexual transvestitism was regarded as unsavory in Mesopotamia.

This is crucial: if only cultic transvestitism was socially acceptable in the broader culture of the ancient Near East, it would indicate that the תועבת יהוה from Deut 22:5 describes a cultic abomination rather than an ethical one. William W. Hallo has noted that Deuteronomy condemns more practices as abhorrent to Yahweh than any other book in the Hebrew Bible, and that many of the abominations listed in Deuteronomy are "precisely those cultic practices most sacred to foreign deities."⁴¹ Deuteronomy is consciously *trying*, in other words, to make Israel different from its neighbors, particularly in regard to the official religion, which was a central feature of national culture throughout the Near East during the first millennium B.C.E. In the seventh century B.C.E., when Deuteronomy was written, political and cultural pressure on Israel from Mesopotamia was intense, and many of the laws found in Deuteronomy reflect resistance to this pressure.⁴² In the ideology of the authors of Deuteronomy, if transvestitism was a part of the religion of Israel's neighbors, it had to be excluded from the cult of Yahweh. Noncultic transvestitism would probably not have been of interest to the Deuteronomic authors, since in all

³⁷ Benno Landsberger, cited in Wilfred G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), 225.

³⁸ Text from Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 226.

³⁹ Ibid., 226; Römer prefers "Amorite" ("Randbemerkungen zur Travestie," 222).

⁴⁰ For the dating of this text, see Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 225. The situation of the Amorites has been discussed by Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "The God Amurru as Emblem of Ethnic and Cultural Identity," in *Ethnicity in Ancient Mesopotamia: Papers Read at the 48th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Leiden, 1–4 July 2002* (ed. W. H. van Soldt; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut Voor Het Nabije Oosten, 2005), 31–46, esp. 41–42.

⁴¹ Hallo, *Book of the People*, 98; idem, "Biblical Abominations," 37.

⁴² Ronald E. Clements, "Deuteronomy, The Book of," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 164–68.

likelihood they already shared a negative opinion of it with their non-Israelite neighbors and so could not use it as a basis for contrasting their beliefs.

IV. THE MEANINGS OF כָּלִי AND גֶּבֶר

Looking at our translations again, we see that each attempts to distinguish between the two nouns for the prohibited items in sections 1a and 1b, as well as the two verbs, even though the verbs are translated in much the same way, if we regard “to wear” and “to put on” as being effectively synonymous. Note how the NJPS translation uses “to put on” for the first verb and “to wear” for the second, while the other examples use these same English verbs in the opposite order. This presents a problem in that translating these two different verbs with the same English meaning masks what might be an important distinction between the difficult כָּלִי of section 1a and the unambiguous שְׂמֹלֶה of section 1b. The use of the verb הָיָה in section 1a is interesting; perhaps one cannot “put on” or “wear” a בָּלִי.

The general meaning of כָּלִי is “article, utensil, vessel,” based on the root /KLH/, meaning “to stop, come to an end, be complete.”⁴³ A related root, /KLʔ/, has the meaning “to shut up, restrain, withhold,” and the root /KLL/ has the meaning “to complete, perfect.” The sense of most other Hebrew words assigned to the biconsonantal root /KL-/ is generally one of completion and enclosure: בָּלָא, “confinement, enclosure”; מִכְלָה, “enclosure, fold”; כָּלָה, “completion”; מִכְלָה and תְּכֵלֶה, “completeness, perfection”; תְּכֵלִיחַ, “end, completeness”; כָּל, “all”; כָּלִיל, “entire, whole.”⁴⁴ In other Semitic languages, we find *klʔ* listed as a personal name in Ugaritic, along with *klāt*, “both” (note *klāt ydh*, “both his hands,” in ʾnt:I:11), which is cognate to the Hebrew כָּלָאִים, “twofold.”⁴⁵ In Akkadian, we have the common verb *kalû*, meaning “to withhold, retain, hold back,” with a number of words based on the same root: *kallu*, “bowl”; *kālû*, “dam”; *kilātu*, “barrage”; *kīlu*, “enclosure”; *maklūtu*, “anchorage, berth.” The additional Akkadian meaning of “completeness” can be found in the words *kališ*, “everywhere, anywhere,” and *kalu*, “whole, entirety, all.”⁴⁶

⁴³ HALOT, 478–79; BDB, 479.

⁴⁴ See the entries in HALOT, 476–80, and BDB, 476–83. Gesenius noted these three roots in relation to כָּלִי (Wilhelm Gesenius, *Thesaurus philologicus criticus linguae hebraeae et chaldaee, Veteris Testamenti* [3 vols.; Leipzig: F. C. G. Vogelii, 1829–42], 685), and the initial /KL-/ common to them demonstrates a well-established phenomenon in the Semitic root system: a basic meaning found in a biconsonantal base which is then modified by a third consonant (Sabatino Moscati, et al., *An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages: Phonology and Morphology* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1969], 72–75).

⁴⁵ UT, 419.

⁴⁶ See the entries in CAD: vol. 8, K, 73–74, 83, 87–91, 95–105, 359–61; vol. 10, M/I, 137.

On this basis, a translation of כלי as “container” makes sense based on the roots /KLH/, /KLʔ/, and /KLL/, and we find this meaning in texts such as 1 Sam 17:40. We could extrapolate a meaning of “garment” based on the idea that clothes go over and around the body (much as we did with שמלה), but as noted above, the use of the verb היה instead of לבש in Deut 22:5 would seem to discount this reading, and there is no unambiguous reading of כלי for “garment” elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Further, there are no cognates with this meaning attested in other Semitic languages. The translation of “apparel” or “garment” for כלי is usually based on its appearance in the plural as “garment” in Rabbinic Hebrew.⁴⁷ This raises the question, however: Was the rabbinic translation actually based on an accurate understanding of the word, or was it based only on the context of the word in Deut 22:5, in which case we have a problem of circular reasoning?

A second approach to understanding כלי-גבר appears in Harry A. Hoffner’s study of the symbols of gender in the ancient Near East. Hoffner argues that the idea of masculinity in ancient Near Eastern culture was based ultimately on a man’s strength in battle and his success in fathering children. This was reflected in a variety of symbols, as was the corresponding female ideal, which was based on sexual allure and motherhood. Just as the roles of male and female were distinct and complementary, so too were their symbols, which in ancient Israel included the bow and arrow for masculinity (2 Sam 1:22; 22:35; 2 Kgs 13:15–19; Hos 1:5; and Ps 127:4–5). For femininity, the symbols included the spindle (Prov 31:19; 2 Sam 3:29) and, based on Deut 22:5, female garments.⁴⁸

Hoffner’s comparative evidence for these symbols includes the Ugaritic stories of the hero Aqhat, who reproaches the goddess Anat for wanting to use a bow (2 Aqhat VI 39–40); the appearance of the bow as a precursor to sex in the Baal and Anat cycle (UT, 76:II and 132), and the West Semitic story of Asherah and Elkunirša, in which the power of the feminine symbol of the spindle is used as a threat. Hoffner also provides several Hittite texts to demonstrate that the same symbols operated in that culture, often in the context of magic, and he even finds these symbols in Homer’s *Odyssey*, where Odysseus alone is able to string his bow and Penelope works her loom while she waits for her husband’s return.⁴⁹ In addition to Hoffner’s examples, there is a story from Egypt in which the goddess Anat is chastised for dressing as a man and acting as a warrior when she is attacked by the god Seth.⁵⁰ The equating of the penis with a weapon (a *mašgašu*, or battle mace) also appears in the ŠA₃.ZI.GA potency ritual KAR 236, lines 10–12.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy = [Devarim]: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 200.

⁴⁸ Hoffner, “Symbols,” 328–29.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 329–32. The story of Asherah and Elkunirša is known from a Hittite translation (Harry A. Hoffner, “The Elkunirša Myth Reconsidered,” *RHA* 23 [1965]: 5–16).

⁵⁰ P. Chester Beatty VII, verso I, 5–II,3, cited in Manniche, *Sexual Life*, 22 and 54.

⁵¹ The CAD defines *mašgašu* as either a “tool” or a “part of a chariot” (CAD M/I, 364). Its

GIM u_2 -ru SAL.UR is-ba-tu $_2$ u_2 -šar UR.GIR $_{15}$
 GIŠ $_3$ -ka li-ri-ka ma-la maš-ga-š u_2
 aš $_2$ -ba-ka ina bu-un-zer-ri ša $_2$ ši-ḥa-a-te

As the pudenda of a bitch seized the penis of a dog,
 may your penis be as long as a battle mace!
 I am seated in a web of pleasures!⁵²

Reaching an understanding of the male gender being symbolically associated with weapons in the ancient Near East, Hoffner concludes that כלי־גבר refers not to clothing but to a weapon, most likely a bow, arguing for a semantic relationship between כלי and the Akkadian word *unūtu*, “tools, equipment, utensils.” He concludes that Deut 22:5 was meant to prevent women from usurping masculine symbols and the power that went with them, but since clothing was not specifically identified with masculinity the way it was with femininity, the prevention of women taking on a male role was achieved not through a clothing ban but rather through a tool or weapon ban. Similarly, he argues that the ban on men wearing female clothing was designed not to prevent men from usurping female power, but to prevent that power from weakening them.⁵³ It is worth noting that virtually all uses of the word כלי as “weapon” in the Hebrew Bible refer to military weapons (the sole exception is Gen 27:3),⁵⁴ which means that a ban on women handling such weapons would include by implication a ban on women serving as soldiers. But is there any further evidence that כלי is a weapon, as Hoffner suggests?

An answer to this question can be found by considering the choice of words for the two opposing categories in sections 1a and 1b of Deut 22:5: אשה for woman and גבר for man. אשה is a general word in Hebrew that refers to women; its masculine equivalent, איש, is likewise a general word that refers to men, and איש would have been the logical choice if the author of this text had wanted to prohibit simple cross-dressing. The word used, however, was גבר, and since Deut 22:5 is the only place in the book of Deuteronomy where this word occurs, we must conclude that the choice of the word was intentional. The distinction between איש and גבר is not made clear in our translations, which treat גבר as synonymous with איש, translating both as “man.”

But the root /GBR/ has a very specific meaning; save for its appearance as “to do, make” in Ethiopic, it is associated with strength and power in every Semitic

association with a weapon is based on the underlying verbal root /ŠGŠ/, which means “to slay in battle” or “murder” (CAD Š/1, 66–69). See Robert D. Biggs, *ŠA.ZI.GA: Ancient Mesopotamian Potency Incantations* (TCS 2; Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1967), 35 n. 11.

⁵² Text from Biggs, *Potency Incantations*, 33.

⁵³ Hoffner, “Symbols,” 331–34. Hoffner argues that David’s curse on the house of Joab in 2 Sam 3:28–29, which includes a reference to Joab’s descendants forever holding “the spindle,” represents just such a symbolic attack on their masculinity.

⁵⁴ K.-M. Beyse, “*keli*,” *TDOT* 7:169–75.

language in which it is attested (Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, and as *gapāru* in Akkadian).⁵⁵ The word גבר itself occurs sixty-five times in the Hebrew Bible, and in his study of the word, Hans Kosmala defines it as follows: "a male person who distinguishes himself from others by his strength, or courage, or uprightness, or some other quality." Kosmala divides the biblical appearance of גבר into three broad categories: reflecting physical strength and virility, reflecting an obedient relationship to Yahweh, and the way the word is used in the book of Job. Physical strength is reflected in both military prowess and access to females; 1 Chr 23:3 refers to the Levites over thirty years of age serving under David; and Jer 41:16 refers to the גבר as men of war. In addition, in Jer 31:22, גבר is associated with נקבה, for which Kosmala argues a purely sexual and procreative meaning, also referring to the statement from the Song of Deborah promising "one or two wombs (רחם רחמתיים) for every גבר" (Judg 5:30).⁵⁶

The גבר, as a man in close relationship with Yahweh, reflects a common ideological perspective from the ancient Near East, where success was based in no small part on divine favor. A גבר, therefore, must by definition be supported by Yahweh, and must act according to his command. This meaning of the word is especially common in the book of Psalms, which at one point berates a גבר who trusts only in his material wealth (Ps 52:8–9). Proverbs 30 describes a גבר who admits his ignorance of the divine and the humility this knowledge brings.⁵⁷

The most interesting use of גבר is in the book of Job, for here the word is basic to the very theme of the book: Yahweh's test of a righteous man. Job argues that he was born a גבר (Job 3:3), which marks the only time in the Hebrew Bible that the word גבר is used to refer to anyone other than an adult male.⁵⁸ One finds in Mesopotamia the idea that one's fate (*šimtu*) was determined at birth,⁵⁹ which Job initially seems to share, adding to the emotional stress his misfortunes cause him. As the narrative develops, it is clear that the meaning of the word גבר is being discussed throughout it; can one be born a גבר, as Job claims, or is the status earned? And must the גבר be continually upright if he is to retain his superior status? The vanity of the גבר, as symbolized by Job, will be brought low by Yahweh (Job 33).

In the end, Job, and thereby the גבר, discovers humility before the divine, and in this way the text has a strong parallel with the Babylonian composition *Ludlul Bel Nemeqi*, in which a superior man is brought low and then restored by Mar-duk.⁶⁰ The message in Job also serves to refute any idea of predestination, for it is

⁵⁵ Hans Kosmala, "gābhar, gebhūrāh, gebhīr, gibbōr, gebher," *TDOT* 2:367–82.

⁵⁶ Hans Kosmala, "The Term *Geber* in the Old Testament and in the Scrolls," in *Congress Volume: Rome 1968* (VTSup 17; Leiden: Brill, 1969), 159–69.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁵⁹ A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (rev. ed. completed by Erica Reiner; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 202.

⁶⁰ Kosmala, "Term *Geber*," 166. For the texts and translation of *Ludlul Bel Nemeqi*, see

only when Job discovers humility that he truly earns his status as a גבר, beginning with Yahweh's statement in 40:7:

אֲזֶרְנָא כַּגְבֵּר חֲלָצִיךָ אֲשַׁלְּךָ וְהוֹדִיעֲנִי

Now gird your loins like a *geber*; I will question you, and you explain to me.

This is followed by Yahweh's justification of his authority, and then Job's repentance.⁶¹ It is with this definition of גבר in mind that we must evaluate the meaning of Deut 22:5.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Women and men cross-dress for very different reasons, to the point that in many cases what a particular society considers transvestitism will be different for each gender. This explains the variation of both the nouns and the verbs in sections 1a and 1b of Deut 22:5. The verse is much more than a simple prohibition of particular wardrobes, and indeed in no way addresses the issue of women wearing masculine garments, since in the culture of ancient Israel the clothing of men was less associated with gender than was the clothing of women. Rather, the verse reflects the most basic ideology of gender in Israelite society, and to this end it distinguishes not simply between male and female but also between different qualities of men. The ideals of manhood and masculinity were not considered either simple or innate; one had to achieve them through action, behavior, and a good relationship with Yahweh. Contrary to Job's initial claim, one could be born a male, an איש, but not a גבר.⁶² Further, to maintain one's status as a גבר required effort, and there was the constant danger that such a man might slip from this superior state by displaying weakness, doubt in Yahweh, or even by inappropriate contact with the wrong items. Being exalted, a גבר had farther to fall than a mere איש. Building on Hoffner's conclusion that in the ancient Near East it was believed that feminine symbols had the power to weaken masculinity, we can therefore see the provisions of Deut 22:5, at least in part, as an effort to protect the גבר.⁶³ In section 1a, by prohibiting all women from accessing a weapon or any other symbol of power not of men in general but of the most masculine and religiously upright of men, the verse sets the גבר clearly apart from women and the danger they represent. In section 1b,

Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 21–62; a more recent translation is in Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (3rd ed.; Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), 392–409.

⁶¹ The process of Job discovering what it is to be a גבר is discussed in detail by Kosmala ("Term *Geber*," 164–67).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 165.

⁶³ See n. 53 above. Hoffner's analysis makes no distinction between the איש and the גבר.

the prohibition of active contact with a potent symbol of all women (wearing a *שמלת אשה*), sets up the warning in part 2 for the *גבר* not to fall from his exalted place by engaging in practices similar to the religious rituals of Israel's polytheistic neighbors and thereby offending Yahweh.

It is equally important to remember, however, that not every man could be a *גבר*, and the existence of both the words *איש* and *גבר* in Biblical Hebrew shows a degree of social flexibility in the Israelite conception of manhood that in other male-dominated societies, such as the Native American tribes of the Great Plains, was handled by the creation of a transvestite class (the *Berdache*).⁶⁴ By distinguishing between the *איש* and the *גבר*, Israelite society allowed men who did not meet the difficult expectations of the masculine ideal to remain culturally male (since transvestitism was frowned upon and therefore could not serve as an outlet), while at the same time providing them with a goal of superior manhood to which they might aspire. Seen in this light, the text of Jer 30:6, in which Yahweh chastises Israel and Judah for doubting that he will restore them, includes a second, more veiled condemnation of transgender behavior by a *גבר*:

מדוע ראיתי כגבר ידיו על-חלציו כילדה

Why do I see every *geber* (with) his hands on his loins like a woman in labor?

Even the best of men, Jeremiah argues, have become like a woman in her most vulnerable and feminine condition, which for the Israelite concept of masculinity is a clear insult, since the image of labor pain and the cries associated with it is a common motif for women in anguish in the ancient Near East. Note the cries of the goddess *Bēlet-ilī* as she laments the flood in the *Gilgamesh Epic* (tablet 11:117–18):

i-šas-si ^d*iš-tar* [*k*]*i-ma a-lit-ti*
u₂-nam-bi Bēlet-ilī (DINGIR.MAḪ) *ṭa-bat rig-ma*

The goddess, screaming like a woman in childbirth,
Bēlet-ilī, the sweet-voiced, wailed aloud.⁶⁵

By implication through Deut 22:5, a *גבר* who behaves like a woman has not merely shown himself to be weak but has also committed an abomination.

For the *אשה*, Deut 22:5 maintains her gender role as both a sexual ornament and a mother, and it is noteworthy that when women do participate in war in the Hebrew Bible, they do not employ traditional weapons or tactics (Jael killing Sisera with guile and a tent peg in Judg 4:17–21, for example).⁶⁶ In turn, the use of the fem-

⁶⁴ See n. 36 above.

⁶⁵ Text from Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 710–11.

⁶⁶ The apocryphal book of Judith presents an exception to this, since Judith kills the Assyrian general Holofernes with his own sword (13:6–10). It is noteworthy that Judith's relative free-

inine equivalents of גבר, גבירה and גברת, is rare in the Hebrew Bible.⁶⁷ Like גבר, these terms can reflect either power or other authority: גבירה is used for “queen” (1 Kgs 11:19), or “queen-mother” (1 Kgs 15:13; 2 Chr 15:16), and גברת for “mistress” (Gen 16:8; Prov 30:23), or a vain female who has fallen (Isa 47:5 and 7), paralleling the similar use of גבר in Job. It is noteworthy that neither גבירה nor גברת is used in Proverbs 31, which describes the ideal wife as an אשה (31:10 and 31:30). While this is limited evidence, it does seem to indicate that the feminine forms of the root /GBR/ reflected political power alone and rarely displayed the additional sexual, military, or religious nuances found in the masculine. In ancient Israel, such subtle distinctions within a gender were less marked for women, probably reflecting their lower status in the patriarchal society common to the entire ancient Near East.

Rabbinic commentary on Deut 22:5 shows that the problems presented by this verse were already being debated in late antiquity. In *Sifre on Deuteronomy* 226, the discussion focuses first on the intermingling of the sexes, as follows:

זהו כללו של דבר שלא תלבש אשה כדרך שהאיש לובש ותלך לבין האנשים
והאיש לא יתקשט בתכשיטי נשים וילך לבין הנשים

This is the basic meaning of the matter: that a woman shall not dress in the way that a man dresses, and go among the men, and the man will not ornament himself in the ornaments of women, and go out among the women.⁶⁸

Note that in this passage, the terms איש and אשה are used, indicating an understanding of גבר as synonymous with the more general word for “man.” The text continues with the following:

רבי אליעזר בן יעקב אומר מנין שלא תלבש אשה כלי זיין ותצא למלחמה

Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob says, “How do we know that a woman must not put on the weapon of a man and go out to war?”⁶⁹

Here we see the use of the root /LBŠ/ in association with כלי, which, as noted above, could be defined as a garment by the rabbinic period, and which therefore

dom and assumption of what in the ancient Near East were traditional male behaviors may well have been a major reason for the exclusion of the book of Judith from the canonical Hebrew Bible (Toni Craven, *Artistry and Faith in the Book of Judith* [SBLDS 70; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983], 117–18).

⁶⁷ HALOT, 173, 176; BDB, 150.

⁶⁸ Text from Louis Finkelstein, *Sifre on Deuteronomy* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1969), 258. For translations of this passage, see also Reuven Hammer, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); and Jacob Neusner, *Sifre to Deuteronomy* (BJS 124; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987).

⁶⁹ Text from Finkelstein, *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, 258.

could be worn. More interesting for our purposes, however, is the reference to war, because Eliezer ben Jacob's speculation makes no reference to cultic activities at all. This view was taken up by Maimonides, who translated כלי as "armor," and Jeffrey Tigay argues that this verifies the interpretation of כלי as "weapon."⁷⁰ It appears that Eliezer ben Jacob saw the use of גבר rather than איש for "man" and regarded the distinction between the two as important. War was an activity properly restricted to males, but, more than this, it represented an important expression of masculine activity; not all men were warriors, but the גבר usually was. This represents a logical expansion of the statement that precedes it, that men and women not mix in their activities, but also shows a more nuanced understanding of the different words for "man."

It is worth noting that by the period of the tannaitic sages, the particular cultic activities of the neighbors of Israel that had been in practice when Deuteronomy was written had long since vanished with those neighbors, and so a complete understanding of them would probably have been alien to the authors of *Sifre on Deuteronomy*. Our own difficulty in understanding the meaning of Deut 22:5 is likewise partly cultural, since we lack the understanding of the symbols of gender in the ancient Near East that a native would have had. The Israelite conception of transvestitism was not the same as transvestitism in modern Western culture; it was based on a cultic tradition absent today, and there is no evidence that the terms שמלה, שמתל אשה, or for that matter any other Biblical Hebrew words related to clothing, had the erotic connotations of the modern English word "lingerie" (modern Hebrew uses לבנים). That no form of women's clothing was specifically eroticized in ancient Israel rendered a basic cause of male fetishistic transvestitism inoperative in that culture. The Israelites did restrict opportunistic female transvestitism, at least in matters of war, much like the societies of the pre-modern west.

Our difficulty with interpretation and translation is also partly linguistic: the Hebrew source language has different words for different qualities of men, while English tends to group them together under the general term "man," using adjectives to be more specific. An understanding of the cultural nature of transvestitism, as well as the use of comparative material from other cultures of the ancient Near East, has helped determine the meaning of כלי in Deut 22:5, and a willingness to add an adjective in the English where none exists in the Hebrew can help with the question of איש versus גבר, allowing us more clearly to distinguish between the precise type of "man" being referred to and the general category of "woman" that is being contrasted with it. Our translation, therefore, should read something like this:

A woman shall not be associated with the instrument of a superior man, and a superior man shall not wear the garment of a woman, for whoever does these things is a cultic abomination to Yahweh your God.

⁷⁰ Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (trans. Shlomo Pines; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 544. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 200.

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Masturbation from Judaism to Victorianism

MICHAEL S. PATTON

ABSTRACT: This article demonstrates how masturbation, based on a misconception of Genesis 38:7-10, was judged harshly in both Judaism and Christianity, laying the foundation historically for social and religious hostility toward sex. Masturbation, known as the "secret sin," a threat to the human race, and an ontic evil, was condemned officially in 1054 by Pope Leo IX.

From the medieval era to Victorianism there evolved new distortions of religion and science, so that masturbation was regarded as unnatural sex, murder, a diabolical practice, and the cause of two-thirds of all diseases and disorders including insanity, neurosis, and neurasthenia. Masturbation has historically served as the catalyst for social change in sexual attitudes.

Introduction

A few scholars have believed that Western civilization, at least since the dawn of Christianity, has been a sex-negative culture, since nearly all forms of sexual expression, with the exception of marital coitus for the sake of procreation, have been regarded with suspicion and hostility. However, other scholars believe that the real origin of sex-negative attitudes in Western civilization has been traced to the philosophical beliefs of certain Persian, Greek, and Roman groups which most probably influenced the development of post-New Testament Christianity.¹

These beliefs were expressed in the various dualistic philosophies such as Zoroastrianism, Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, and Stoicism, which separated matter from spirit, body from soul, women from men, pleasure from reproduction, and sex from God, as evil from good.² This social script became the historical context in which Judeo-Christianity began to prohibit and condemn all forms of sex not leading to reproduction. One nonprocreative form that became unconventional was masturbation, since it was greatly feared as a threat to the survival of the human race.³

Masturbation was condemned in Judaism and Christianity as the "secret sin" and became the basis for social taboo as a sexual deviation in Western civilization.⁴ It became the primary means of transmitting from one culture to the next the image that sex was to be feared rather than enjoyed.⁵ The tradition concerning masturbation has thus existed for nearly two millennia, while the counter-tradition has existed only since 1960. Social change in attitudes toward masturbation has occurred at the professional level only since 1960 and at the popular level since 1970.⁶

Masturbation has been a "common means of sexual pleasure," yet it has

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been harshly judged and misunderstood by religious and medical professionals.⁷ There has been no other form of sexual activity that has been more frequently discussed, more roundly condemned, and more universally practiced than masturbation.⁸ Thus, it is in the roots of the Judeo-Christian heritage that the real significance of masturbation can be traced for the entire Western heritage.

Judaism

The real prohibition of masturbation began with the story of Onan in Genesis 38:7-10, which has been perennially used to prohibit masturbation in Jewish tradition, and which prohibition eventually spread to Christianity during the medieval era.⁹ The Onan story was based on a misconception of fact. Onan's act of wasting the seed is explicitly stated as motivated by his unwillingness to produce offspring who would be considered his brother's descendants. It was precisely for this violation of the Torah that Onan was struck dead.¹⁰ However, Onan's sexual activity has only recently been interpreted as "coitus interruptus" rather than masturbation. Thus, Onan's sudden death, upon refusal to perform sexual intercourse with his brother's wife to continue the family lineage, has become the root for Judeo-Christian attitudes toward genital masturbation, also known as onanism. Therefore, onanism and masturbation erroneously became synonymous, which influenced the historical development of thought in Christianity and the Western heritage concerning masturbation.¹¹

From early Jewish history, all sexual activity outside coitus in marriage was prohibited, since it did not lead to procreation. This belief laid the religious basis for Christian attitudes toward sex, which in turn influenced nearly all Western attitudes toward sex. In the Talmud, masturbation was strictly condemned and even provoked the death penalty. It is not clear whether these prohibitions of masturbation applied to both men and women.¹² The morality of sex was far more rigorous in Israel than in Egypt, Greece, or Rome. Sexual license was considered a profanation of God, who transcended all sexual activity, including masturbation.¹³

Early Christianity

The classical trend in Western civilization has been the belief that sex was for procreation but not for pleasure, thought, or erotic delight. Masturbation was promoted in ancient Greece, tolerated in Rome, condemned in Israel, and eventually condemned in medieval Christianity.¹⁴

Sacred texts

The oral tradition was the primary means of recording the words and events of Jesus. Much of what Jesus said probably did not survive the first century A.D.,

since there was no one to record it all. Thus, Jesus probably did not condemn masturbation, since there have been found no *ipsima verba*, namely, words spoken by Jesus on this subject.¹⁵ The classical paradigm that nonprocreative sex was evil developed in the early Church.¹⁶ Nevertheless, there is no legislation in the Bible pertaining to masturbation.¹⁷

The first-century Christians were probably hostile to sex, in anticipation of the second coming of Christ. Sex was perceived as a threat to the Christian religion.¹⁸ Masturbation did not lead to procreation, and therefore it was prohibited in the early Church and eventually condemned during the Middle Ages.¹⁹

While it is certain that the evidence is that the Hebrew and Christian scriptures have not condemned masturbation per se, certain texts have been used to support the moral condemnation of masturbation, namely, Leviticus 15:16, Deuteronomy 23:9–11, Romans 1:24, I Corinthians 6:10.²⁰

Scripture scholars have become increasingly skeptical of using any biblical texts to prove or disprove a position on sexual ethics. Biblical fundamentalists, who interpret scripture as literally spoken by God, have provided the strongest opposition to such scholarship. Scholars have found these biblical passages, upon textual criticism, to be inadequate to verify the idea of the condemnation of masturbation.²¹

Patristics

Churchmen gradually became the prime source of many Christian attitudes toward human sexuality as European culture evolved. Christianity was an agent of social change during the decline of the Roman Empire and the rise of Western societies.

Clerical celibacy, popular during the post-New Testament era of Christianity, became more commonly accepted as the ideal lifestyle for many churchmen, although some churchmen were married in the first millenium of Christianity. It is clear that from the start both married and unmarried men were ordained ministers in the Christian churches. In the first centuries there was an increase in the number of priests who remained unmarried of their own free will, inspired by the same motives as were monks. During the rise of monasticism, from the fifth century A.D., nonprocreative sexual expressions such as masturbation or homosexuality were prohibited, since they were probably feared to be a threat to the continuation of the human race and a salient obstacle to perfect union with God.

Gradually, by the end of the fourth century, there developed the law of sexual abstinence for married priests, for the purpose of ritual purity, a *lex continentiae*, which forbade sexual intercourse on the night before celebrating the Eucharist as a sacred meal. This law of sexual continence extended from the fourth century until the twelfth century.²² Thus, clerical celibacy was not made mandatory in the West until the thirteenth century, when the Roman Church was able to "enforce" the concept of clerical celibacy through its elaborate system of church law.²³

Nevertheless, it was the celibate clergy that probably exercised the most influence on the development of a Christian sex ethic. Many of the early Church fathers were influenced by various Near-Eastern philosophies, such as Roman Stoicism, Greek Neo-Platonism, Jewish Gnosticism, Persian Zoroastrianism, and Christian Manicheanism, all of which condemned in some ascetic fashion sexual pleasure divorced from procreation. These various philosophies of non-pleasure surely influenced some of the early Church fathers to develop ascetic sexual attitudes eventually codified in both canon and civil law. The notion of clerical celibacy was reinforced as the ideal Christian lifestyle which transcended all sexual pleasure.²⁴

Augustine

In the sex field, the most dominant writer of the early church was St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in North Africa (380–450 A.D.). Gradually Christianity adopted many of Augustine's sexual attitudes; however, not all of the early or later Church fathers agreed with Augustine's notion of sex.²⁵

Augustine viewed masturbation as unnatural, since it did not lead to procreation, a traditional Christian value.²⁶ He preferred prostitution and fornication to masturbation, since the former was a natural sin, while the latter was an unnatural sin.²⁷ Augustine believed that sexual intercourse was only the result of animal lust, and so procreation became the only justification of sexual intercourse between husband and wife. The Christian Church gradually reinforced Augustine's concept of sex.²⁸

Later medieval, Renaissance, and modern attitudes toward sex were ultimately rooted in Augustine's sexual anthropology, which was developed from his experience of Manichean and Neo-Platonic notions of cosmology and anthropology. These attitudes, which tended to distort human sexuality and women, were modified, amplified, and incorporated into the medieval canon law—*codex canonici*—which influenced not only the development of civil law, but also the cultural norms in the entire Western civilization.²⁹ It has been scholarly belief that Augustine influenced the development of sex ethics in the Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions at least until the Second Vatican Council in 1962.³⁰

Middle Ages: 500–1400

The Middle Ages were a crucial period in the development of Western sex attitudes. There has been very little research into medieval sexuality. In fact, there remains much distortion about sex in the medieval period, which has been more neglected, in terms of sex research, than has the modern period. This ignorance and distortion have been due not only to the grave difficulty of gaining access to prime source materials but also to the general attitude toward the "Christian heritage." In much of Christian literature, sex has been regarded as sinful except for the purpose of procreation.³¹

In medieval Judaism, masturbation became regarded as a grave offense. In the Talmud it continued to be associated with Onan.³² In medieval Christianity masturbation became identified for the first time with the act of Onan and was first officially condemned by Pope Leo IX in 1054. The first dated reference to onanism in Catholicism was to Theodulphus, bishop of Orleans in the ninth century.³³ Gradually onanism became distinguished from masturbation in the penitentials. Masturbation was usually regarded as a form of self-arousal, while onanism was perceived as a form of contraception.³⁴

Penitentials

These books of sins, with their lists of appropriate penances, have become a prime source of information on medieval attitudes toward sex in Catholicism.³⁵ In the British penitentials from the *Synod of North Britain*, about 520, an adult masturbator had to do penance for a year, while a boy of twelve years had either forty days or three forty-day periods.³⁶ Masturbation was one of the cardinal sins of commission during the seventh century, as indicated in the Irish penitentials.³⁷ The Irish penitentials of St. Columban required one-year penance for the married masturbator and a half year for the non-married masturbator; however, clerical masturbators were required to undergo two years of penance.³⁸

In the Middle Ages masturbation was regarded by the Church with horror, and placed above other sexual sins. It was stressed perhaps because it was so common among the clergy.³⁹ It is uncertain whether ordinary men and women had much of a problem with masturbation.⁴⁰ It was apparently a problem in monastic and religious life for both men and women. Pope Leo IX condemned masturbation in 1054, which condemnation was followed by those of Pope Alexander VII in 1666 and Pope Innocent in 1679.⁴¹

Natural law

A characteristic of medieval Europe was the attempt to rationalize Christianity in terms of natural-law theology based on Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. Thus, medieval theologians classified sexual sins as either natural or unnatural. This rational distinction was based fundamentally on whether or not the sexual sin allowed for the purpose of procreation, the traditional Judeo-Christian value. Thus, fornication, rape, incest, and adultery were declared illicit but natural sins, because procreation could result from these sexual expressions. On the contrary, masturbation was regarded as twice as sinful because it was both illicit and unnatural. Masturbation joined sodomy and bestiality as the unnatural sins, since procreation could not result from its practice.⁴²

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), although not as rigid as Augustine on sex doctrine, nevertheless became a prime source of Christian attitudes toward sex

during an age of scholastic philosophy and theology. Aquinas viewed masturbation as a "grave sin against nature," since it did not lead to procreation. Aquinas regarded lust as sinful, since it caused the human person to become irrational and perform sexually deviant behavior, such as masturbation. The author of the *Summa Theologiae* regarded masturbation as analogous to homicide, since it destroyed human semen, which contained a potential human person. This later became the moral argument for the rejection of masturbation during the Renaissance era.⁴³ As a result of such teaching, theophobia, an inordinate fear of God, became a dominant trend in medieval life, since masturbation was considered a mortal sin which merited eternal hell for the masturbator.⁴⁴ The fear of hell, especially as a result of sexual practices, has caused tremendous harm over the course of the centuries.⁴⁵

Church control

During the Middle Ages three trends were paradoxically common: the belief that sex was the work of the devil, the cult of erotic love, and nude bathing in public.

Ultimately the Catholic Church was able to assert control over family values with an educational campaign based on fear and with sex teachings derived from the various Church fathers and reinforced by the newly discovered canon law of Gratian. Sexophobia, the inordinate fear of sex and sexuality, and theophobia, the inordinate fear of God, probably resulted for many Catholics.

People who did not conform to the Church standards on sex were regarded as "heretics." Ironically, most medieval heretics were accused of committing sexual sins. Some were regarded as witches and threatened with the death penalty, although the Church itself never killed anyone for sex crimes. Rather, the state carried out the ecclesiastic sentence in any documented cases.

Renaissance Europe

By the fifteenth century, a Renaissance era, the Church had continued its hostility toward sex. It became so obsessed with "sex as a sin" that hundreds of thousands of Europeans were tortured in order to be made to admit sexual encounters with the devil. Many were publicly burned alive during the Inquisition, when entire villages in southern Germany and Switzerland were exterminated, as some villages were in the Holocaust.⁴⁶

During the rebirth of classical humanism in the fifteenth century, it was thought that demons possessed certain men and women, causing them to masturbate.⁴⁷ Neither Protestantism nor Catholicism approved of non-procreative sexuality, such as masturbation. The epidemic spread of syphilis during the sixteenth century reinforced traditional attitudes toward masturbation, although masturbation probably became common practice owing to this inordinate fear of venereal disease.⁴⁸ Sex was very "open" in society.⁴⁹

The Renaissance and Reformation resurrected eroticism after the

Inquisition, but soon the age of science during the era of Puritanism and Victorianism extinguished it once again.⁵⁰ Meanwhile the belief developed, in primitive biological science, reinforced by moral theologians, that the total human product was contained in the male semen or seed. Thus, the effort to preserve the seed became a high priority based on this misconception of biology and moral theology. Eventually it became difficult to distinguish masturbation from contraception or abortion, since in all of these actions the total human product was being killed or wasted. Moral theologians in the Catholic Church then explained the evilness of masturbation in terms of the loss and destruction of human semen.⁵¹ Thus, a new argument for the condemnation of masturbation was added to the historical list of arguments. The Church became extremely hostile to any form of sexuality that was contraceptive in nature.⁵²

Age of science

Just as science was beginning to learn more about human sexuality in terms of reproduction biology, it discovered new reasons to repress and condemn masturbation, analogous to what religion had done for centuries.⁵³ In Western culture, masturbation had traditionally been looked upon as a form of sex relief and therefore a dangerous pastime. Christianity expressed considerable fear over masturbation as the "secret sin." In spite of apparent religious hostility, it seems clear that masturbation has been generally practiced throughout much of Western history, although empirical data to verify this assumption have not been available until Kinsey. Medical and scientific writers generally ignored the study of masturbation until the eighteenth century, when masturbation, as a matter of faith and morals, came to be regarded as an important topic for medical and scientific research.⁵⁴

Before 1707 masturbation was treated as a sin only in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. But after *Onania*, published by Samuel Tissot (1728-1797), a Lausanne physician, masturbation became a social disease that caused every unexplainable physical and mental deviation.⁵⁵ Tissot went much further than did the Church fathers in condemning masturbation, causing a medical-scientific revolution that affected Europe and the United States until very recently.⁵⁶

Age of Enlightenment

Paradoxically, it was during an era of scientific and philosophical progress that science discovered so many irrational and oppressive theories of sexual deviance, with masturbation as the principal etiology of most social deviance.⁵⁷

In the next 250 years, the masturbatory hypothesis in medicine reinforced the traditional attitudes of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, thus con-

demning masturbation with new reasons never before considered by religion. *Onania* became the first medical reference in history to the deviant effects of masturbation.⁵⁸

The masturbatory hypothesis probably became so successful because it was reinforced by the pyramid paradigm of authority present in nearly all aspects of the social order as in family, church, state, medicine, and education. There was little resistance to this paradigm of authority, so much an integral part of Western society.⁵⁹

Onania and its sequels

The book *Onania, A Treatise upon the Disorders Produced by Masturbation or the Heinous Sin of Self Pollution*, was written in 1707 by an anonymous clergyman. This book reached 80 editions and resulted in the universal belief that masturbation caused serious mental, physical, and spiritual harm.⁶⁰ The book established a belief, based on misconception of fact, for the next two and one-half centuries that medical and psychological deviation resulted from orgasmic manipulation of the male and female genitalia.⁶¹ The author of *Onania* was the first to identify the terms "onanism," "masturbation," and "self-abuse" as univocal, since these terms had been used analogously and equivocally in the Judeo-Christian tradition.⁶²

Samuel Tissot, a devout Swiss Catholic neurologist and medical advisor to the Vatican, published a new edition of *Onania* in 1758, thereby revolutionizing European and American medical opinion and practice. Tissot held that masturbation caused insanity, due to excessive blood flow to the brain. The symptoms were nervous exhaustion, perpetual fatigue, and melancholia.⁶³ This became known in the medical literature as the "masturbatory insanity" hypothesis. Indeed, two-thirds of all human diseases, medical and psychological, were attributed to masturbation, which became the scapegoat to explain the etiology of rare or uncommon diseases.⁶⁴ Masturbation has been regarded as the linchpin to the rest of the sexual attitudes in society.⁶⁵

Some of the more common effects of masturbation that were alleged by various European and American medical societies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were: anxiety, blood disorders, constipation, death, disease of the penis, disease of the uterus, epilepsy, headaches, heart disease, hereditary degeneration, homicidal tendencies, hypochondria, impotency, insanity (dementia praecox), lung damage, manic depression, nausea, nervous disorders, neurasthenia, neurological disorders, nymphomania, pathophobia, prostate disorders, satyriasis, scrupulosity, suicide,⁶⁶ acne, cardiac arrhythmias, conjunctivitis, dysmenorrhea, hearing defects, poor general health, rickets, small penile size, severe lethargy, and vision defects.⁶⁷

Following Tissot's *Onania*, there was an avalanche of literature that concerned masturbation and that simply reiterated Tissot's hypothesis about its evil effects.⁶⁸ The Alienists were a group of medical experts who dominated the literature on masturbation. They believed that masturbation was the prime cause of insanity. Benjamin Rush, father of American psychiatry, Esquival, Luther Bell, David Skae, and Maudsley were famous Alienists.⁶⁹

Other famous doctors found reasons to condemn masturbation: Sylvester Graham, Lallemand, and William Acton all worried equally about the loss of male semen through masturbation, which was held to cause insanity by exhausting the nervous system.⁷⁰ Kellogg wrote that many symptoms in the masturbator eventually caused insanity. Such symptoms included: general debility, premature and defective development, sudden personality changes, insomnia, love of solitude, untrustworthiness, indecision, bashfulness, confusion, fear, acne or pimples, biting of fingernails, shifty eyes, epileptic fits, bedwetting, and the use of obscene words.⁷¹ The result of these theories was the reinforcement, with scientific foundation, of traditional Western hostility toward sex.⁷²

Women masturbators suffered the same consequences that males did but in addition were afflicted with rickets, hysteria, jaundice, stomach cramps, womb ulcers, elongation and eruption of the clitoris, loss of interest in the opposite sex, hermaphroditism, leucorrhea, painful menstruation, falling of the womb, loss of pleasure in the sex act, painful childbirth, and obstinate sterility.⁷³

Jacobi, founder of American pediatrics, reported that infantile paralysis and infantile rheumatism were caused by masturbation.⁷⁴ Scott held that masturbation caused homosexuality, a theory later reinforced by Krafft-Ebing, perhaps the most influential medical doctor of the early twentieth century who specialized in sexual deviation. In some medical literature, onanism or masturbation was also a euphemism for homosexuality.⁷⁵ Hall, a pioneer in American psychology, held that onanism was caused by seduction of "younger by older" children and thus led to sexual perversion.⁷⁶

The American medical conceptions of masturbation and homosexuality caused widespread confusion in the nineteenth century. This confusion led to sexophobia in society: a general fear of sex. Homosexuality was often classified under the term onanism or masturbation. However, classifying all "deviant" sex practices as onanism caused confusion. Some regarded all non-coital sexual expressions as masturbation.⁷⁷

Anti-masturbatory inventions

After Tissot had created a sensation about the dangers of onanism or masturbation, various inventors patented a number of inventions to prevent "self-abuse" or masturbation, considered a social disease in the nineteenth century.

One response was moral admonition. It was assumed that patients would stop their "vice" of masturbation upon admonition, by their clergy and physicians, about its grave consequences. This was popular in Germany. In England, surgery was performed to prevent masturbation; however, it was soon recognized that no surgical technique was able to prevent masturbation.⁷⁸

In the United States and Europe treatments used for masturbation were: informing and disciplining the patient, special diets, exercise, local application

of camphor, potassium bromide, cautery of the genitals or spine, opium, and electrodesiccation of bladder and rectum, clitoridectomy, circumcision, and even male castration.⁷⁹

Between 1856 and 1932 various patented inventions were designed to prevent masturbation: the sleeping ring, the cup with padlock, the truss, the penis plate, the sheath, the handjive, the locking pockets, the live wire, and the body suit. These inventions were designed to repress masturbation by causing sharp pain in the penis or preventing the masturbator from fondling his or her genitals.⁸⁰

Victorianism, a fundamentalist movement different from Puritanism, became a mixture of secular and religious dualism in both science and sex, laying a further foundation for a double-standard sex ethic. It tabooed sexual conversation but produced the sex pioneers: Freud, Ellis, Krafft-Ebing. It warned against the social and moral evils of masturbation but encouraged it by supplying no other outlet. These and other trends led to antisexism.⁸¹

Women were sexually repressed during the nineteenth century, for the sake of moral purity. The greatest fear was that women would masturbate if they rode a bicycle, a horse, or worked at a sewing machine in a factory. All of these means would cause female orgasm without procreation.⁸²

For the Victorians, masturbation became the principal means of demonstrating that sex was a loathsome disease passed on from one generation to another. This was the real significance of masturbation for the nineteenth century.⁸³

From masturbatory insanity to masturbatory neurosis

Toward the end of the nineteenth century a change in medical paradigms occurred which saw masturbation no longer as the cause of insanity but, rather, as the cause of neurasthenia and neurosis. This paradigm became known in medical literature as the "masturbatory neurosis" hypothesis, which, although it was only a hypothesis, became widespread belief and practice. Both examples of medical theory regarding masturbation are clear evidence of how the medical establishment became a threat to public health by causing the masses to believe in medical distortions concerning masturbation. Such belief apparently reached an epidemic proportion in society and might be properly considered an example of iatrogenesis in which an epidemic disease of masturbatory insanity or neurosis was caused by the medical profession; however, this fact is an embarrassment to the contemporary medical institution. It has been nearly impossible to reverse this distortion concerning masturbation.⁸⁴

As an illustration, such doctors as Beard, Charcot, and Janet promoted "masturbatory neurosis" in opposition to the traditional "masturbatory insanity" hypothesis. Nevertheless, Clouston, Savage, Goodal, Hall, and Bianchi continued to believe that masturbation caused insanity. This might verify how deep-rooted the latter belief was among medical scientists. It was not until 1896 that Krapelia discovered that masturbation has never caused insanity. There was never a clear cause-and-effect relationship established between

masturbation and insanity, since most of the people tested were already in the insane asylums where sex research was conducted in the nineteenth century. This "asylum" bias eventually invalidated part of the "masturbatory insanity" hypothesis.⁸⁵ Stekel, a psychiatrist who attempted eventually to exonerate both the medical and social structures from negative attitudes toward masturbation, once stated that if the traditional claims that masturbation caused insanity and neurosis had been true, then the vast majority of the human race should be locked in the insane asylums.⁸⁶

Summary

The religious condemnation of masturbation has an evolutionary history. The roots of Catholic sex orthodoxy were in the ancient Near East: Greece, Rome, Persia, and Israel. The story of Onan, from Judaism, influenced the understanding of masturbation for the first millenium of Christianity, although masturbation was not officially condemned by the Vatican until 1054 A.D.

The Onan story was based on misconception and misinterpretation of Genesis 38:7-10; nevertheless, paralleled with the development of natural-law theology during the medieval era, masturbation was condemned for not leading to procreation and was thus termed unnatural sex.⁸⁷

In short, medieval attitudes toward masturbation were full of contradictions. Great hostility was expressed toward those who engaged in intercourse for purposes other than procreation, regardless of whether the sexual activity was heterosexual, homosexual, or autosexual. Masturbation was regarded, in canon law, as a sexual deviation which threatened to destroy the human race.⁸⁸ Later, medieval biologists and moral theologians charged that human semen was "sacred fluid," since it contained a potential human person. Therefore, each act of masturbation became an act of willful homicide.⁸⁹ For these particular reasons masturbation had to be condemned by ecclesiastical authorities, laying the groundwork for later medical and scientific condemnation.

It is worth noting that although Christian theory was somewhat hostile to human sexuality, it was not always borne out in actual practice. There was apparently a conflict in conscience between moral theory and practice. Social scientists have indicated that the more strict the social laws of behavior for people to conform with their conscience are, the more people tend to ignore or escape these laws in practice, thus establishing the social script for a double-standard morality.⁹⁰

Conflicts over sex appeared very early in conciliar history, and while some agreement was obtained in a series of church councils, not all segments of Christian society accepted these decisions. Thus, the official positions of the Roman Church on sex remained the religious ideal and did not necessarily coincide with reality.⁹¹

These attitudes toward sex in the medieval era became the foundation of sexual attitudes in Western civilization and the social catalyst for much of the sexual revolution during the twentieth century.

The sin against nature developed anxiety feelings in Western people about all forms of sexual activity not leading to procreation. Eventually the medical community in the eighteenth century defined masturbation to mean all sexual activity not leading to procreation.⁹²

The Catholic Church continued to condemn masturbation well into the Renaissance era as the Church became obsessed with "sex as sin," permitting the Inquisition to exterminate sexual heretics or deviants. Hundreds of thousands were burned alive during the "sexual holocaust." Masturbation was feared to be caused by demoniac possession. Eventually the misconception that human semen contained a "person" became common belief among biologists and moral theologians as the new argument to condemn masturbation. Masturbation was regarded as willful murder.

Samuel Tissot began a revolution in European and American medicine with his theory, published in *Onania*, that masturbation caused insanity. Medical scientists eventually attributed two-thirds of all diseases and disorders to masturbation. At first, doctors believed masturbation caused insanity, and only after a hundred years did they say it caused neurosis and not insanity. Victorian society became frenzied over the need to repress the masturbator, so that iatrogenesis resulted, as most of society believed in the evil effects of masturbation taught by the medical profession and reinforced by the Judeo-Christian sex ethic. It would take the sex pioneers of the early twentieth century to begin to unravel the traumatic consequences of so many centuries of hostility to masturbation.

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"And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying down of a Woman": On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

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“And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman”: On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

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LEVITICUS 18:22 AND 20:13 occur in the context of legislation in the Holiness Source (or “H”)¹ which constructs sexual boundaries for ancient Israelites. The laws of 18:22 and 20:13 pertain to male-male sex, though it is not clear at first glance exactly which acts or act they proscribe.² The statutes utilize an otherwise unattested idiom—*miškēbē*

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¹Leviticus 17–26 has long been considered a collection of legal materials of separate provenance from the Priestly School, attributed to the Holiness School, so-called because of their concern for the holiness of Yahweh and the whole land of Israel, its protection, and their demand that Israel be holy too. This unit is called the “Holiness Code” or “Source” by most scholars (in short notation, “H”). In the past, it was thought to have been incorporated by the Priestly Source (or “P”) into P’s great legal corpus stretching from Exod. 24 well into Numbers, possibly before the sixth century B.C.E., possibly during that century or soon after. The most recent work on the relationship of H and P tends to modify and even reverse aspects of this hypothesis: H materials occur among P materials outside the so-called Holiness Code (in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers), so H is by no means restricted to Lev. 17–26; H was P’s editor, not vice versa. This conclusion was reached independently both by J. Milgrom (*Leviticus 1–16* [New York, 1991], pp. 13–35); and Y. Knohl (“The Priestly Torah versus the Holiness School: Sabbath and the Festivals,” *Shnaton* 7/8 [1983/84]: 109–46 [Hebrew], published in English in *Hebrew Union College Annual* 58 [1987]: 65–117).

²Most modern commentators do not acknowledge the ambiguity of these legal formulations, though John Boswell notes that there is “considerable room for doubt about precisely what is being prohibited” (*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* [Chicago, 1980], p. 101, n. 34).

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ʾiṣṣā, “the lying down of a woman”—to describe prohibited sexual activity between males, an idiom whose meaning is not at all transparent. The laws of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 read as follows:

wēʾet zākār lōʾ tiṣkab miškēbē ʾiṣṣā tōʿēbā hīʾ

And with a male you shall not lie the lying down of a woman; it is a tōʿēbā.³

wēʾiṣ ʾāšer yiṣkab ʾet zākār miškēbē ʾiṣṣā tōʿēbā ʾāsû šenēhem môt yûmātû dēmēhem bām

And as for the man who lies with a male the lying down of a woman, they—the two of them—have committed a tōʿēbā; they shall certainly be put to death; their blood is upon them.

Commentators for more than two millennia have struggled to interpret these laws. Some have understood them to prohibit specifically the insertive role in anal intercourse; others, the insertive and receptive roles;

³Conventionally translated “abomination.” It is the only act to be labeled such in the laws of Lev. 18 themselves; in the redactorial frame of Lev. 18:26–30 all the preceding acts are tōʿēbôt (contrast the framework in verses 1–5, where maʾāseh, “deed,” “act,” occurs instead; this suggests the hand of a different redactor in the prologue to the laws of chapter 18). The meaning of tōʿēbā is not altogether clear; it may not mean exactly the same thing in all circles. It occurs commonly in wisdom texts such as Proverbs; in Deuteronomy and deuteronomistic materials; in Ezekiel; and in the Holiness Source. Outside of Israel, the word occurs in the sixth century B.C.E. Tabnit inscription from Sidon (H. Donner and W. Röllig, eds., *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, 4th ed., 3 vols. [Wiesbaden, 1979], inscription no. 13, line 6) where the opening of a grave is called a tōʿēbā of the goddess Ashtart. Usage in general suggests the violation of a socially constructed boundary, the undermining or reversal of what is conventional, the order of things as the ancient might see it. Examples of tōʿēbôt illustrate this well: unclean animals (Deut. 14:3); sacrificial animals with bodily defects (Deut. 17:1); violation of dress conventions (cross-dressing either way; Deut. 22:5 and 4QOrd^a [= 4Q159 2–4 1.7]); reversal of expected behavior roles, e.g., he who justifies the wicked and declares the innocent guilty in a legal setting (Prov. 17:15). Yahweh is said to despise the tōʿēbā (Deut. 12:31). The conventional translation “abomination” suggests only what is abhorrent; it does not get across the sense of the violation of a socially constructed boundary, the reversal or undermining of what is conventional, but viewed as established by the deity. Boswell’s notion (pp. 100–101) that the tōʿēbā is usually associated not with what is “intrinsically evil,” but with what is “ritually unclean” is simply unfounded; this polarity is alien both to H and to the wider Israelite cultural context (see similarly the criticisms of D. E. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* [Chicago, 1988], p. 196; on Boswell’s treatment in general, Greenberg’s critique is useful [pp. 195–96]). On the sense of tōʿēbā in various biblical contexts, see further Milgrom, “tōʿēbā,” *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Jerusalem, 1965–88), 8:466–68 (Hebrew); and especially P. Humbert, “Le substantif tōʿēbā et le verbe tʾb dans l’Ancien Testament,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 72 (1960): 217–37.

still others all sex acts between males.⁴ They are the only such laws in the Hebrew Bible; there is absolutely nothing analogous to them in the other Israelite legal collections mediated to us,⁵ though their uniqueness has not generally been acknowledged by scholars.⁶ In contrast, other laws in Lev. 18 and 20 that proscribe incestuous relations (Lev. 18:6–18;

⁴Among classical rabbinic discussions, see Siphra, Qod. 9.14 and the similar material in b. San. 54b. These texts assume that the law of Lev. 18:22 proscribes the insertive act. They expand the prohibition to cover both the activity of the insertive partner and that of the receptive partner by reference to the penalty of Lev. 20:13, which mentions both men; laws elsewhere concerning the qāḏēš, who is assumed to be a receptive cult prostitute by the rabbis (opinion of R. Ishmael according to b. San. 54b who cites Deut. 23:18; 1 Kings 14:24); or by repositing the consonantal text of tškb in Lev 18:22 as a passive verbal form (opinion of R. Aqiba according to Siphra, Qod. 9:14 and b. San. 54b: "you shall not lie . . ." becomes "you shall not be laid . . ."). Rashi, commenting on Lev. 20:13, thought the law referred to the insertive role specifically. See further the modern, methodologically sophisticated discussion of M. L. Satlow, "They Abused Him Like a Woman: Homoeroticism, Gender Blurring, and the Rabbis in Late Antiquity," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1994): 1–25, who engages other texts as well as some of those mentioned above. Satlow's discussion brought Siphra, Qod. 9.14 to my attention. Recent commentators on Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, like their premodern counterparts, tend to divide into two groups: those who assume that the laws refer specifically to anal intercourse between men, and those who assert that they refer to homoerotic acts in general (frequently labeled "homosexuality" by these scholars). None of these scholars provides a sustained argument in defense of his position on the meaning of the laws. For the former view, see among others S. Bigger, "The Family Laws of Leviticus 18 in Their Setting," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979): 202; B. Levine, *Leviticus* (New York, 1989), p. 123; Thomas M. Thurston, "Leviticus 18:22 and the Prohibition of Homosexual Acts," in *Homophobia and the Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. M. L. Stemmeler and J. M. Clark (Dallas, 1990), p. 16; Satlow, pp. 5, 6 and n. 12, pp. 9, 10. For the latter view, see among others N. H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* (London, 1967), p. 126; G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1979), p. 259; S. Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19–20: Family, Community and Social Disintegration," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 368–69; Greenberg, p. 191; Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism* (Bloomington, IN, 1990), p. 183; and D. Biale, *Eros and the Jews* (New York, 1992), p. 29. K. Elliger, *Leviticus* (Tübingen, 1966), p. 241, assumed that the laws proscribe pederasty.

⁵Several discrete legal collections in addition to those of H and P are embedded in the Pentateuch; these include the "Book of the Covenant" (Exod. 20:22–23:33); the J-mediated materials of Exod. 34; the large Deuteronomical legal collection (Deut. 12–26); the Deuteronomical curses (Deut. 27:15–26); and the decalogue (in two forms: Exod. 20:2–17 and Deut. 5:6–21).

⁶Satlow is an exception, though he does not mention all of the other legal collections where one might expect analogous laws to occur (p. 5, n. 10). Some scholars and translators allege that pentateuchal laws other than Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 concern males who engage in sex acts with other males, but this has not been demonstrated convincingly. The material concerning the qāḏēš remains unclear; the word, which occurs in a number of biblical contexts, means simply "holy one," though it is frequently translated "male cult prostitute" (see Deut. 23:18 [EV 17]; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:47; 2 Kings 23:7; on the qēḏēšā, the female "holy one," see Gen. 38:21, 22; Deut. 23:18 [EV 17]; Hos. 4:14). Recent discussion has tended to cast doubt on the assumption that the qāḏēš was a cult

20:11–12, 14, 17, 19–21), adultery (Lev. 18:20; 20:10), and human-animal couplings (Lev. 18:23; 20:15–16)—laws to which Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 are frequently compared—are paralleled elsewhere: both the Book of the Covenant and the curses of Deuteronomy prohibit human-animal sex acts (Exod. 22:18; Deut. 27:21); other Deuteronomic legal materials interdict male-female couplings that violate incest boundaries (Deut. 23:1; 27:20, 22–23); and adultery is forbidden in a number of Israelite legal contexts.⁷ Given this, there is no reason to assume any nec-

prostitute of any sort, let alone one who engages other males. On the qādēš and his counterpart the qēdēšā, see further M. I. Gruber, “The *qadesh* in the Book of Kings and in other Sources,” *Tarbiz* 52 (1983): 167–76 [Hebrew], who argues that the qādēš was a temple singer; J. G. Westenholz, “Tamar, qēdēšā, qadištu, and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia,” *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989): 245–65, who challenges the idea of sacred prostitution in Mesopotamia and elsewhere in the ancient Near East. In contrast, see recently K. van der Toorn, “Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows in Ancient Israel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 193–205, who argues that prostitution of women and men to fulfill vows occurred in ancient Israel and that the qādēš and qēdēšā cannot be separated from this phenomenon. In passing, van der Toorn refers to the qādēš as a “catamite,” but offers no evidence to support this interpretation (p. 201). Related to the qādēš according to Deut. 23:18–19 [EV 17–18] is the “dog” (keleb), whose “price” should not be brought to Yahweh’s temple to fulfill any vow. Translators have frequently understood this term to refer to a male prostitute who engages other males, translating “sodomite” or something similar. The term also occurs in a list of cultic staff from a Phoenician temple in Kition, Cyprus (Donner and Röllig, eds., inscription 37B, line 10), but without reference to function. Even if the “dog” were a male prostitute—which is not clear—there is no evidence that his activity involved other men. Whatever the meaning of the “dog” and qādēš, the passages concerning them do not represent general proscriptions of some or all male-male sexual acts; only Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 can be taken that way. The Sodom and Gomorrah story in Gen. 18–19 is obviously literary and not legal; at issue is the threat of (gang) rape of male guests by an unruly crowd of men, who also threaten the host Lot, himself a resident alien. Such threats are illustrative of the general wickedness of the cities of the plain according to J, the traditionist responsible for the story. An argument against the carnal nature of the threats is as unlikely as it is audacious; Lot’s answer to the men of the city in Gen. 19:8—“I have two daughters who have not known a man. . . . Do with them as you like”—and the sexual use to the verb “to know” in the parallel version of the story in Judg. 19 indicate that coerced intercourse is meant when the unruly gang demands “to know” the guest(s). Compare Boswell, pp. 93–96, who develops the thesis of D. S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London, 1955), that the men of Sodom were not demanding sexual relations. At the same time, to ignore the very specific context of the threats (gang rape of male guests and their resident alien host) and generalize about biblical attitudes toward “homosexuality” is equally mistaken. Commentators have tended to emphasize the threat of rape against Lot’s guests, while ignoring the threat against Lot himself and his status as a resident alien, someone generally viewed in Israelite law as vulnerable and in need of special protection from oppression (see, e.g., Exod. 22:20 [EV 21]; 23:9).

⁷Exod. 20:14 and Deut. 5:18; Deut. 22:22, 23–24, 25–27; Num. 5:11–31.

essary association between the prohibitions of male couplings found in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 and the various incest, adultery, and bestiality interdictions present in the same legal contexts.⁸ If there is a link, it must be the result of transmission and/or redactorial intention; the contemporary investigator is responsible to seek out reasons why the tradents and/or editors of Lev. 18 and 20 might have associated laws prohibiting incestuous relations, adultery, bestiality, and male couplings. The H framework material in these chapters associates all the violations enumerated with uncleanness and the potential defilement of the land of Israel, which must be protected. In the final form of Lev. 18 and 20, there is no separating Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 and the other laws in these chapters from H's distinct construction of purity.

In this article, I seek to address some of the problems associated with the interpretation of the laws of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 in a thoroughgoing way. My purpose is threefold: (1) to establish the meaning of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 on philological grounds and to offer suggestions concerning their editorial history; (2) to compare and contrast the notions of gendered sexual roles and the bounding of receptivity evident in these laws with those of Athens, Rome, and Assyria, all of which had laws in some manner restricting male couplings; (3) to assess recent explanations of the presence of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 among the laws of Lev. 18 and 20 and in the wider H legal context and to offer my own proposal.

I

What do Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 actually mean? Determining this is complicated by the presence of the opaque idiom *miškēbē 'iššā* in both formulations.⁹ The most common translation of *miškēbē 'iššā*, "as with a

⁸Some commentators assume such a necessary association; they tend to be apologists for a conservative morality, and their arguments build on the final H casting of the laws of Lev. 18 and 20, in which all of the enumerated sexual violations are called *tô'ēbôt* and associated with the allegedly defiling behavior of the Canaanites and Egyptians. Conservative commentators tend to amplify and highlight the associations established by the final redactors of Lev. 18 and 20 without reference to issues of redactional intention or legal prehistory. See, e.g., N. Lamm, "Judaism and the Modern Attitude to Homosexuality," in *Contemporary Jewish Ethics*, ed. M. M. Kellner (New York, 1978), p. 379, who emphasizes that "sodomy," "buggery," and incest are "linked" in these passages; the implications of his comment are obvious. See similarly the widely cited commentator D. Z. Hoffmann, who argues that both homoerotic sex acts and bestiality share an end in common: satisfaction of "*animal desire*" [my emphasis] rather than reproduction (*Sefer Wayyiqra* [Jerusalem, 1953], 2:23). This approach is found also in classical rabbinic texts, as Satlow shows (pp. 21–22 and nn.).

⁹The reason for the plural *miškēbē 'iššā* remains unexplained, though it came to the attention of rabbinic commentators in the Talmud and elsewhere, who speculated that it

woman,” is interpretive, not literal: it remains to be demonstrated whether it captures the sense of the prohibition adequately.¹⁰ A study of the uses of a similar and apparently related idiom *miškab zākār*, “the lying down of a male,” provides some insight into the meaning of the opaque *miškēbē ’iššā*. The expression *miškab zākār* occurs in Num. 31:17, 18, and 35, and Judg. 21:11 and 12.¹¹ In Judg. 21:12, a virgin girl (*na’ārā bêtûlā*) is defined as one who “has not known a man with respect to the lying down of a male” (*lō’ yādē’ā ’iš lēmiškab zākār*).¹² Her opposite, the nonvirgin, mentioned in verse 11, is a woman who “knows the lying down of a male” (*’iššā yōda’at miškab zākār*). The same idiom occurs in Num. 31, a text that also seeks to distinguish between women who are virgins and women who are nonvirgins. The nonvirgin is “any woman who knows a man with respect to the lying down of a male” (*kol ’iššā yōda’at ’iš lēmiškab zākār*; verse 17); the virgin is any woman who has “not known the lying down of a male” (*lō’ yādē’û miškab zākār*; verses 18, 35). The idiom *miškab zākār*, literally “the lying down of a male,” must mean specifically male vaginal penetration in these contexts: the experience of *miškab zākār* defines a nonvirgin over against a virgin, who lacks such experience specifically. The expression “to know the lying down of a male” seems to mean the same thing as the more common-place idiom “to know a man”; texts such as Judg. 21:12 and Num. 31:17 use two equivalent expressions to make the same point, where either alone would be sufficient, as Judg. 21:11 and Num. 31:18, 35 indicate.¹³

Are the expressions *miškab zākār* and *miškēbē ’iššā* a pair? The expression *miškēbē ’iššā*, like *miškab zākār*, is clearly sexual, and neither *miškab*

referred to two possible sex acts with a woman. See, e.g., b. San. 54a, 55a, and b. Yeb. 54b, where the two *miškēbôt* are discussed.

¹⁰Some conventional English translations of Lev. 18:22: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (RSV and NRSV); “Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence” (New Jewish Publication Society Version); “You must not lie with a man as with a woman. This is a hateful thing” (JB); “Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is an abomination” (AV). Virtually without exception, the difficult “lying down of a woman” is rendered “as with a woman” or something similar.

¹¹Bigger, p. 203, notes the existence of the idiom *miškab zākār* when discussing *miškēbē ’iššā*, and claims *miškab zākār* is a “P expression.” Its use in Judg. 21 suggests that it is not an idiom restricted to P. Bigger does not use *miškab zākār* to determine the range in meaning of *miškēbē ’iššā*.

¹²On the preposition *lē* meaning “with respect to,” see E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, trans. A. E. Cowley, 2d ed. (Oxford, 1910), para. 119u; Paul Joüon, *Grammaire de l’hébreu biblique* (Rome, 1923), para. 133d.

¹³Compare Gen. 24:16, where “virgin” (*bêtûlā*) is further defined by the comment “no man had known her.”

nēqēbâ (the expected companion of miškab zākār) nor miškēbê 'iššâ (the expected companion of miškēbê 'iššâ) are attested. Why zākār is paired with 'iššâ instead of nēqēbâ or 'iššâ with zākār instead of 'iš is not at all clear.¹⁴ If miškēbê 'iššâ and miškab zākār are a pair, as they appear to be, and miškab zākār has a restricted usage, as it apparently does, the range of meaning for the idiom miškēbê 'iššâ should be equally restricted. If miškab zākār means specifically "male vaginal penetration," its analogue miškēbê 'iššâ should mean something like "the act or condition of a woman's being penetrated," or, more simply, "vaginal receptivity," the opposite of vaginal penetration.¹⁵ Thus, in vaginal intercourse, a woman experiences (idiomatically "knows" or "lies") miškab zākār (male penetration) while presumably, she offers her partner miškēbê 'iššâ (vaginal receptivity), which he experiences ("knows" or "lies").¹⁶

But what of the use of the idiom miškēbê 'iššâ to describe a sex act between men? The usage here seems anomalous if this idiom did indeed refer to what a male experiences in vaginal intercourse, as I have suggested. If I am correct that the range of meaning to be attributed to miškēbê 'iššâ is as limited as the range of miškab zākār, then the male-male sex laws of the Holiness Source appear to be circumscribed in their meaning; they seem to refer specifically to intercourse and suggest that anal penetration was seen as analogous to vaginal penetration on some level, since "the lying down of a woman" seems to mean vaginal recep-

¹⁴As an aside, I note that among the Dead Sea Scrolls a plural miškēbê zākār occurs (1QS a 1.10). The use of this idiom at Qumran at the end of the first millennium is at odds with its use in Num. 31 and Judg. 21; here, it refers not to what a woman experiences in intercourse with a man but to what a man experiences with a woman (wēlō' yi[qrab] 'el 'iššâ lēda'tāh lēmiškēbê zākār). Perhaps the restricted use of the idiom as attested in Num. 31 and Judg. 21 was lost by the end of the millennium; possibly the meaning of the idiom had changed. A solution is elusive, though the former explanation is more plausible than the latter.

¹⁵This is a speculation of course, since there are no extant texts in which the idiom miškēbê 'iššâ is actually used of a coupling between a man and woman (it occurs only in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13). Several readers of prepublication versions of this manuscript raised the possibility that miškēbê 'iššâ could refer to acts other than vaginal receptivity, but I think it unlikely; to assume this, one would have to assume that miškab zākār also refers to a range of sexual acts, and this position cannot be defended in light of the biblical evidence for the restricted usage of miškab zākār.

¹⁶In biblical prose idiom, a woman can "lie" with a man just as a man can "lie" with a woman: see, e.g., Gen. 19:33–35 passim, where the idioms šakab 'im and šakab 'et are used of Lot's daughters (brought to my attention by ibn Ezra's comments on Lev. 18:22); the interchangeability of šakab 'im and šakab 'et suggests that there is no difference in meaning between them. Compare also Gen. 39:7, 12; 2 Sam. 13:11, where women demand that a man "lie with" them. Since both a man and a woman can "know" or "lie" sexually, there is probably no difference in meaning between the two idioms: both mean to experience intercourse.

tivity.¹⁷ Why anal intercourse and not some other sexual act between men? The idiom “to lie with” means to copulate in other legal and non-legal contexts, so I think it very likely that it has such a meaning in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 as well, except in this case, anal intercourse is meant.

Which partner in a male-male coupling is addressed by the law in Lev. 18:22? The insertive partner or the receptive one? I believe it is the penetrator rather than the penetrated man. In other legal contexts, men are commanded not “to lie with” various female receptive partners.¹⁸ In fact, in the wider context of biblical law, the idiom “to lie with” is used exclusively of insertive partners.¹⁹ I suspect that the same is true of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13: the laws address the insertive partner in a male-male coupling. Furthermore, “with a male you shall not lie the lying down of a woman” implies that you (masculine singular [m.s.]) *shall* lie “the lying down of a woman” with a female. If this is so, it would again suggest that the insertive partner is addressed. This would make perfect sense, given that a woman experiences “the lying down of a male” when she engages in intercourse, and a man presumably experiences “the lying down of a woman.” This interpretation is consistent with the views of some traditional interpreters of the law, who believed that the verses address the insertive partner.²⁰ The other possible interpretation—that the law addresses the potential receptive partner—seems less likely, since it appears that *miškēbê ’iṣṣā* is what a male experiences in vaginal intercourse, and the law stipulates that “you” (m.s.) shall not experience it with a male.²¹

The law of Lev. 18:22 addresses only one of the participants (“you” m.s.); in contrast, the formulation in 20:13 begins by mentioning “the man who lies” (i.e., “you” of 18:22) but changes number from singular

¹⁷Bigger (n. 4 above), p. 203, picking up on the use of *miškēbê ’iṣṣā* to describe an act between men, and using a different vocabulary, makes a similar point: he states that the Israelites viewed “homosexuality as an unnatural variant of heterosexuality.” At issue here is a single legal collection (that of H) and its view of a single sex act (anal penetration of a male), not the modern constructs “homosexuality” and “heterosexuality,” and not the issue of “natural” acts versus “unnatural” acts. “Proscribed” would have been more suitable than “unnatural.”

¹⁸For example, Lev. 19:20; 20:11, 12, 18, 20 in H; and Lev. 15:18, 24, 33; Num. 5:19 in P.

¹⁹Though elsewhere, in nonlegal settings (Gen. 19:33–35 *passim*; cf. Gen. 39:7, 12; 2 Sam. 13:11), a woman “lies with” a man, as noted above.

²⁰See, e.g., m. San. 7:4; m. Ker. 1:1; and Rashi on Lev. 20:13. Contrast the views attributed to R. Aqiba and R. Ishmael in b. San. 54b, who assert that both the insertive and receptive partners are addressed by the law; see similarly ibn Ezra on Lev. 18:22.

²¹Many thanks to my colleagues Shaye J. D. Cohen and David Konstan (conversation, December 8, 1993) and one anonymous reader for their suggestions and criticism, which have helped me to clarify and strengthen my argumentation at this juncture.

to plural in the middle of the verse. As it now stands, the formulation with the penalty in Lev. 20:13 emphasizes the guilt of both parties: “they—the two of them—have committed a *tô’ēbâ*; they shall certainly be put to death; their blood is upon them.” The change of number from the beginning of the law to its conclusion is awkward; it suggests redactorial activity intended to widen the scope of the law to include both parties. The emphatic attention to the culpability of both partners also leads me to suspect editorial recasting. Are there analogous cases of such redactorial reworking elsewhere among the laws in the Holiness Source? The best example is Lev. 20:10, a law concerning adultery, which shares characteristics with Lev. 20:13. Leviticus 20:10 begins by mentioning “a man who commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor” and states that “he shall surely be put to death” (*môt yûmat*); then it adds, awkwardly, “the adulterer and the adulteress” (*hannō’ēp wēhannō’āpet*). As in Lev. 20:13, the law begins by focusing on a singular subject (“the man who commits adultery”); in contrast to 20:13, the penalty is prescribed for the man alone, and only afterward is the adulteress included in the penalty.²² At all events the effect is the same: laws originally mentioning a single guilty party were recast awkwardly in order to apply the death penalty to both partners. In the case of Lev. 20:10, the law originally applied to the adulterer alone; in the case of Lev. 20:13 (as in 18:22), to the insertive partner in a male-male coupling. If my suggestion of editorial reworking is correct, then only the respective insertive partners (the adulterer and the insertive partner of the male-male coupling) were punished by both of these laws at an earlier stage in their formulation. In the final form of the various laws of Lev. 20, all parties involved in sexual boundary violations are to be put to death or otherwise penalized.²³ But this says nothing about the earlier form of these laws, several of which appear to have been more restricted in their application.²⁴

Thus we may speak of at least two identifiable stages in the develop-

²²Compare the similar formulation of an adultery statute in Deut. 22:22. It begins by addressing “a man who lies with a woman who is another man’s wife” but goes on to prescribe the death penalty for both parties using very emphatic language.

²³For example, the man who marries a woman and her mother, or the man who lies with his daughter-in-law, or the woman who has intercourse with an animal.

²⁴Though an awkward change of subject is commonplace throughout the laws of Lev. 20, 20:15 and 17 are especially noteworthy. Leviticus 20:17 begins with “a man who takes his sister . . . and sees her nakedness” and continues with the woman seeing “his nakedness” and a punishment addressed to both parties: “they will be cut off.” But then the text awkwardly switches back to the man alone: “The nakedness of his sister he uncovered; he shall bear his punishment.” Reworking of biblical law was a commonplace; on this, see the discussions of D. Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Cambridge, 1947), pp. 74–101; and M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York, 1985), pp. 187–90, who cites Daube.

ment of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13: (1) a final, redacted version of the laws that is extant in the biblical text, in which the act of the insertive partner is the focus of the prohibition (both 18:22 and 20:13); the receptive partner is equally culpable (20:13); and male-male intercourse is associated with other sexual acts, all of which are described as defiling to the self and the land, called *tô'ēbôt*, and associated with the Egyptians and/or the Canaanites in H framing materials (18:1–5, 24–30; 20:7–8, 22–24); and (2) an earlier stage of development, which I have reconstructed, in which anal penetration of another male was proscribed, and probably called a *tô'ēbâ*;²⁵ the insertive partner was probably executed; and the receptive partner was not penalized or even mentioned in 20:13. The reason for the proscription of male-male anal intercourse at this earlier or penultimate stage is unclear. Purity considerations, central to the framing materials of the final redaction of Lev. 18 and 20, are not evident from either 18:22 or 20:13 themselves, even in their final casting.

II

Notions of gendered sexual roles were apparently crucial in shaping H's boundary constructions defining licit and illicit sex acts at both the penultimate and final stages in the development of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13. Anal receptivity is compared by implication to vaginal receptivity through the use of the idiom *miškēbê 'iššâ*, but the laws make clear that vaginal receptivity has no acceptable analogue among men: Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 imply that a male must experience ("lie") "the lying down of a woman" with women only.²⁶ Receptivity is bounded on the basis of biological sex; it is constructed as appropriate exclusively to females; it is gendered as feminine. Neither the laws of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 nor the framing materials give reasons why this is so; there is no allusion in them to the "structure of creation," the expectation that human males and females will couple and procreate as in the Priestly Source's (P's) creation story (Gen. 1:1–2:4a). If the Holiness School were P's editors, as J. Milgrom, Y. Knohl, and others now believe, they might well have had access to the creation story of the Priestly Source with its command to "be

²⁵In the final redaction of the laws of Lev. 18, all of the prohibited acts are called *tô'ēbôt* (Lev. 18:26–27, 29–30); in the laws themselves, the word *tô'ēbâ* occurs only in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13. Given this anomaly, it seems likely that the association of male-male anal intercourse and the notion of *tô'ēbâ* predates the final, redactional stages of these chapters. If anything, H redactors responsible for materials in the framework of 18:24–30 probably elaborated the *tô'ēbâ* idea from 18:22 and 20:13, applying it to all of the listed violations.

²⁶This observation applies to earlier versions of these laws as much as the final casting, for there is no reason to assume the idiom *miškēbê 'iššâ* was not present at earlier stages of the development of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13.

fruitful and multiply." Whether or not they had access to it or to something similar of their own (which we no longer have), there is no direct allusion to such ideas in Lev. 18 or 20. In contrast, later rabbinic commentators (postclassical) developed the gendered and sex-bound framework implied in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, grounding it explicitly in "creation." In his comments on Lev. 18:22, the medieval commentator Abraham ibn Ezra states that the male was created "to do" (la'āsôt) and the female "to be done" (lēhē'āsôt); creation's scheme should not be "overturned" by any breakdown of these roles.

The bounding of receptivity exclusively to women may explain why only the insertive partner in a male-male coupling is addressed directly (i.e., in the second person) in Lev. 18:22. When there is direct address in a legal context, as in Lev. 18, generally male landowners heading households are called upon; women—like minors, slaves, resident aliens, and the poor—are generally mentioned only in the third person, when they are mentioned at all.²⁷ Because the penetrator is viewed as male in the legal context of Lev. 18:22, he alone is addressed directly by the legislation; the receptive partner, viewed as the equivalent of a female, is not.²⁸ I have argued that only the insertive partner in a male coupling—like the man who commits adultery in Lev. 20:10—was punished at an earlier stage in the development of these laws. How can this be explained? Possibly because each penetrator was seen as an agent acting on the body of his receptive partner (the woman in the case of adultery; the penetrated male in a male coupling); the receptive partner was in turn viewed as a passive recipient of that action rather than an active participant in his or her own right. Receptivity, if viewed as passivity, would perhaps have rendered them guiltless at a stage before the work of the final H tradents. In the final form of the laws of Lev. 18 and 20, purity concerns are paradigmatic: all the violations enumerated cause defilement and threaten the Israelite presence in the land, for the land cannot

²⁷A good example of this is Lev. 18:23: "With any beast *you* (m.s.) shall not give your effusion . . . *nor shall a woman stand* before a beast. . . ." The individual male who has relations with a quadruped is addressed directly; the woman who does the same is mentioned in the third person. Not all legal formulations use direct address; many laws address men, or both men and women, indirectly (e.g., Deut. 22:5, 13–21, 22, 23–27, 28–29). It may be that women are addressed implicitly in certain legal texts such as Deut. 16:11–12, 13–14 (on the celebration of the festivals of Shevuot and Succot). Here, "you (m.s.) and your son, your daughter, your male slave, your female slave, the Levite . . . will rejoice before Yahweh" during these festivals; missing is the wife, who may be addressed by implication through the mention of her husband (in other words, "you" m.s. implies the wife also). In any case, women are not typically addressed directly in biblical law. On the male head of household's exclusive control of landed property and most household assets during his lifetime, see R. Westbrook, *Property and Family in Biblical Law* (Sheffield, 1991), p. 14.

²⁸Neither party is addressed directly in Lev. 20:13.

tolerate uncleanness (Lev. 18:24–30; 20:22–26). Therefore, all who participate in any of the enumerated violations are a threat to the land's purity and must be punished accordingly. Otherwise, Israel might lose its land. Thus the laws must have been reworked, with punishment of all parties, to incorporate the distinct view of the purity of the land and the need for its protection.

Classical cultures also bounded receptivity but in a different manner. Recent scholarship suggests that socially sanctioned penetrative sex acts were restricted to couplings of social unequals in the Athenian context:²⁹ adult male citizens penetrated only legal inferiors such as slaves, women, foreigners, or youths.³⁰ Adult males of the citizen class were never to be penetrated themselves; in fact, the literature denigrates those who were thought to be receptive.³¹ A male of the citizen class who is willingly penetrated “detaches himself from the ranks of male citizenry and classifies himself with women and foreigners.”³² Thus, two adult male citizens could not legitimately engage in sex acts.³³ The practice of prostitution by a male citizen was forbidden by law, and the practitioner was subject to restrictions on his political activities and, potentially, severe penalties; in contrast, prostitution by male noncitizens was approved, even taxed!³⁴ Rome was similar to Athens in a number of respects. Freeborn males penetrated females and males of inferior status but not each other.³⁵

²⁹I am indebted particularly to the work of K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, 1989); D. M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York, 1990); J. J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire* (New York, 1990); and A. Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus*, rev. ed. (New York, 1992), and “Not before Homosexuality,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3 (1993): 523–73, for information on Athens and Rome.

³⁰Some claim that youths of the citizen class were never anally penetrated, for that would have been degrading for them; instead, intercrural penetration was practiced. See Dover, pp. 91–100, on intercrural and anal penetration, and pp. 103–4 on the “dishonor” of a citizen who allows another to penetrate him in any manner. Others acknowledge this as the ideal but argue that real penetration occurred (Halperin, p. 55, citing Dover, “Postscript, 1989” in Dover, pp. 204–6). Dover points out in his postscript that the evidence of the vases for intercrural penetration must be balanced by a consideration of the evidence from comedic texts, which suggest that anal penetration did occur (p. 204; cf. p. 99, where Dover mentions evidence from comedy). See also M. Golden, “Slavery and Homosexuality at Athens,” *Phoenix* 38 (1984): 308–24, on the status of boys.

³¹Dover, p. 103; Halperin, pp. 22–23.

³²Dover, p. 103–4.

³³Halperin, p. 31, describes the idea as “virtually inconceivable.” See also Dover, pp. 103–4; and Niko Besnier, “Polynesian Gender Liminality through Time and Space,” in *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (New York, 1994), on some comparable patterns of homoeroticism in Polynesia.

³⁴Dover, pp. 19–39. On the problem of the date of the law, see *ibid.*, pp. 33–34, who argues that it must date at least to the period before 424 B.C.E.

³⁵Richlin, “Not before Homosexuality,” p. 533.

Their sanctioned pederastic relations were restricted to youths who were not freeborn, such as prostitutes and slaves,³⁶ much in contrast to the pederasty of Athens, in which youths of the citizen class were courted by adult male citizens. As in Athens in the case of the citizen class, the penetration of a freeborn Roman male was the subject of censure and prohibited by law.³⁷ In addition to anal penetration, Roman society had very particular ideas about oral penetration, which it constructed in a similar manner: the receptive role was degrading and excluded for the freeborn male.³⁸ The receptive and insertive roles were primarily status-bound in both the Athenian and Roman contexts, though the language of gender played an important role in the manner in which these roles were discussed. In both contexts, inappropriate penetration was frequently likened to feminization: to be penetrated was to be feminized, to surrender male status and authority, a baffling act in these cultural settings.³⁹ However, in both contexts "feminization" of certain males (noncitizens, nonfreeborn) was acceptable because of their inferior status. At Athens and Rome, slaves, foreign residents, and other legal inferiors did not claim the same legal rights and privileges as the freeborn; nor were legal inferiors subject to the same restrictions in behavior. In contrast to the purely sex-bound and gender-bound receptivity of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, where no status, age, or other distinctions are made, at Athens and Rome receptivity was status-bound but not sex-bound, with gender playing a role in shaping the sexual rhetoric.⁴⁰

The wealth of comparative evidence to be culled from classical cul-

³⁶Ibid., pp. 537–38. See also Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus*, pp. 34, 220.

³⁷See, further, Richlin's survey of various materials on infamia, rape, and the lex Scantinia in Roman contexts ("Not before Homosexuality," pp. 554–71). Richlin argues that the lex Scantinia punished freeborn men who were receptive in intercourse.

³⁸Richlin, "Not before Homosexuality," pp. 534, 539, *The Garden of Priapus*, pp. 26, 220; and "The Meaning of *Irrumare* in Catullus and Martial," *Classical Philology* 76 (1981): 40–46. Compare Athenian evidence in Dover, p. 99, on the vases, which suggest that male-male oral copulation was "peculiar to satyrs"; Dover also mentions some contradictory textual evidence. See also Dover's postscript, p. 205: "The role of the fellator is essentially subordinate. . . . So far we have no evidence that an erastes fellated his eromenos."

³⁹Richlin, "Not before Homosexuality," p. 531, citing Seneca (*Epistolae* 95.21) on women, who are "born to be penetrated" (*pati natae*) and receptive men, who "suffer womanish things" (*muliebria pati*). For Athens, cf. Dover (n. 29 above), pp. 103–4.

⁴⁰I am conscious of the difficulties one encounters when setting out to compare legal evidence such as Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 to a wider range of cultural materials such as what survives from classical Athens and Rome. At Athens, e.g., it is possible to speak about how a variety of sources that did not necessarily come from the same time period portray homoerotic behaviors; these include illustrated vases, other visual representations, literature of various kinds, graffiti, jokes, laws, etc. (see further Dover, pp. 1–17, on the range, date, and provenance of source materials). Scholars have detected and discussed conflicts among the

tures is not matched by the ancient Near East, though Babylonian, Assyrian, Egyptian, and other materials are extant.⁴¹ Of the various extant corpora of Near Eastern legislation, only the Middle Assyrian Laws (MAL) and the Hittite Laws deal at all with the subject of male-male sexual relations; Hammurapi, Eshnunna, and other legal collections say nothing about this matter. Nor is there legal evidence from Egypt. Neither the Hittite Laws nor the Middle Assyrian Laws prohibit male-male intercourse without qualification. Paragraph 189 of the Hittite Laws states that a man may not have sexual relations with his mother, daughter, or son. The context suggests that kinship is the issue in the case of the son, not his sex: he is mentioned as one-third of the family triad.⁴² Nowhere in this corpus is there a general interdiction of male-male couplings.⁴³ Middle Assyrian Law A 19 concerns false accusations of a male engaging in repeated, apparently voluntary receptive intercourse;⁴⁴ it says nothing about repeated penetration of other males. A second law,

various witnesses themselves. For Rome there is a similar range of data. But for ancient Israel there is no such body of materials. By necessity, if comparisons are to be made, we must liken a pair of laws from a single legal collection to a fairly wide-ranging variety of cultural materials from various time periods from Athens and Rome. There is something to be gained by comparing what little we have from Israel to the evidence of other civilizations, as long as we remain conscious of the potential pitfalls.

⁴¹On Assyria and Babylon, see the excellent survey of J. Bottéro and H. Petschow, "Homosexualität," in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* (Berlin, 1975), 4:460–61, who discuss visual representations as well as texts. On Egypt, see the brief treatment of W. Westendorf, "Homosexualität," in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (Wiesbaden, 1977), 2:1272–74, with bibliography; H. Goedicke, "Unrecognized Sportings," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 6 (1967): 97–102, who reconstructs a variety of attitudes—positive and negative—toward homoeroticism in Egypt; and L. Manniche, "Some Aspects of Ancient Egyptian Sexual Life," *Acta Orientalia* 38 (1977): 11–23, esp. 14–15, and *Sexual Life in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1987). Much thanks to Steven Thompson for pointing me in the direction of the last two references.

⁴²H. Hoffner, "Incest, Sodomy and Bestiality in the Ancient Near East," in *Orient and Occident: Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. H. Hoffner, Alter Orient und Altes Testament, vol. 22 (Neukirchen-Vluyn and Kevelaer, 1973), p. 83, makes this point.

⁴³See further the discussion of *ibid.*, pp. 83, 84. Hoffner believes that these laws date at least to the middle of the seventeenth century B.C.E.

⁴⁴The Gtn (iterative) of *nāku/niāku* is used: "They have (illicit) intercourse with him repeatedly" (*ittinikūš*). The verb *nāku/niāku*, "to have (illicit) intercourse," occurs throughout the formulations of MAL A 19–20. It is used elsewhere of illicit sex acts (e.g., adultery, in MAL A 17 68; 18 74). Derived nouns and adjectives include *nīku*, "adultery," "fornication" and *nīku/nīktu*, "ravished," "raped" (see MAL A 23). Some of these obviously imply coercion, though it is not clear that the verb, when used alone, necessarily suggests the use of force; certainly in MAL A 19 it does not (likewise MAL A 17 68 and 18 74). On the verb *nāku/niāku*, see further "*nāku* [*niāku*]," in *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (Chicago, 1956–), 11.1:197–98. On the sense of MAL A 19, see further Bottéro and Petschow, p. 462.

MAL A 20, seems to proscribe rape involving two males of equal status (or some kind of relationship of physical proximity, though this seems less likely).⁴⁵ The equal status of the partner is suggested by the word *tappā'u*, often translated "companion," "colleague," or "neighbor."⁴⁶ Only the insertive partner is punished in MAL A 20 (and with rape and castration!); the receptive partner (the *tappā'u*) is apparently viewed as the victim of aggression so that no penalty is prescribed for him.⁴⁷ The verb *nāku/niāku*,⁴⁸ "to have (illicit) intercourse," is used throughout MAL A 19–20; though it does not necessarily indicate coercion by the insertive partner, it does suggest clearly that his act is illicit in some manner. His punishment, however, suggests that he used force, as others have argued.⁴⁹ It seems as if the law in A 20 is concerned with the rape of a man by another of equal status or close relationship, while the law in A 19 concerns repeated, voluntary assumption of the receptive role in intercourse. Middle Assyrian Laws A 19–20 occur in the context of a series of laws addressing crimes committed against married women. G. Cardascia and J. Bottéro have both concluded that the placement of MAL A 19–20 suggests that the receptive partner in a male-male coupling was viewed in this legal setting as the equivalent of a woman.⁵⁰ This observation seems valid whether the receptivity was coerced or not, since one law (A 19) concerns consensual behavior and the other

⁴⁵For example, contiguous neighbors, as in MAL B 8 or 19. See below for a discussion of the possible meanings of *tappā'u*.

⁴⁶See the discussions of G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (Oxford, 1935), pp. 66–68; and more recently, G. Cardascia, *Les lois assyriennes* (Paris, 1969), p. 68; and Bottéro and Petschow, pp. 461–62, on *tappā'u*. See also W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1965–81), 3:1321–22. Driver and Miles argue that the "tappau was a person belonging to or taken into the family or clan or village-community for the purpose of the common ownership or cultivation of land" (p. 67). Later, as individual holdings increased, *tappā'u* came to designate the neighbor. They acknowledge that this formulation is the result of complete conjecture. But there are instances in the MAL themselves where it is clear that the *tappā'u* is the next door neighbor (see B 8 and 41 on this); other uses of the word in the MAL are ambiguous. It seems likely that the *tappā'u* was more generally one of equal status. The word is used of business partners, fellow officials, even fellow soldiers or officers in various contexts and periods, in addition to neighbors (as discussed by Driver and Miles, p. 66). In Old Babylonian commercial contexts, a related abstract noun *tappūtu* occurs commonly, with the meaning "business partnership" (thanks to Ben Foster for pointing this out to me). Bottéro and Petschow, pp. 461–62, describe the *tappā'u* as one "du même rang social" or, "qui fréquente la même société," which seems apt.

⁴⁷Cardascia, pp. 134–35.

⁴⁸See n. 44 above.

⁴⁹See the discussions of Bottéro and Petschow, p. 462; and Greenberg (n. 3 above), p. 126 and n. 5, who follows Bottéro and Petschow.

⁵⁰Cardascia, p. 41; and J. Bottéro, *Antiquités assyro-babyloniennes* (Paris, 1967), pp. 87–88.

probably describes coerced acts. On this one may compare both the Holiness Source and the evidence from the classical world: in both contexts, receptivity is associated with femininity and feminization. In Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, as in MAL A 20, the receptive partner was not originally punished; only the penetrator was penalized, though in the biblical context there is no evidence to suggest that the insertive partner used coercion.

Were receptivity and the insertive role status-bound in the Middle Assyrian Laws, as they were at Athens and Rome? Or were appropriate configurations of sexual behavior constructed on another basis? We are told in A 20 only that if a male penetrates a *tappā'u* (presumably by force), he will be punished by castration and rape; nothing is said of the penetration (forced or unforced) of males who are not the *tappā'u* of the hypothetical insertive partner, nor of those who may be the *tappā'u* but are not forced into receptivity.⁵¹ If it were licit for a male of higher status to penetrate only a male of lower status, the situation would have been in some respects comparable to that of Athens and Rome. Though likely, it is in no way clear that this was so; only an argument from silence can be made. If it were acceptable for a male to penetrate one of equal status, as long as the relations were consensual, then the construction of sanctioned sex acts reflected in MAL A 20 would contrast sharply with the evidence of Athens and Rome. But again, as in the case of penetrating a male of lower status, only an argument from silence can be made.⁵² Further, the law of A 20 might well have been based on ideas of community and physical proximity rather than equal status, since it is possible that *tappā'u* suggested these, though this seems less likely. If this were the case, it might have been licit to penetrate males who were not part of one's village or clan, or those who were, with their consent. If the *tappā'u* were a member of the village or clan rather than one of equal status, then the construction of licit sex acts would again contrast with Athens and Rome, for community membership would play a central role in creating boundaries. Whatever the meaning of *tappā'u*, MAL A 20, like the evidence from Athens and Rome, differs from Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, which proscribe male-male couplings without qualification, both at the penultimate and final stages in the development of these laws.

The general proscription of male-male intercourse in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 is striking in light of the evidence from Athens, Rome, and the

⁵¹Driver and Miles, p. 71, anticipate me on this point, as do Bottéro and Petschow (n. 41 above), p. 462. Driver and Miles believe it was only an offense to have sexual relations with one's *tappā'u*. Bottéro and Petschow take a more nuanced position, pointing out that forcing the *tappā'u* is the issue, not intercourse with the *tappā'u* per se.

⁵²For such an argument, see Bottéro and Petschow, p. 462. They are probably correct.

Middle Assyrian Laws. In the classical cultural contexts, status plays a significant part in determining licit and illicit couplings between males and in the bounding of the receptive and insertive roles: a nonfreeborn male could be legitimately penetrated by any man; in contrast, a freeborn male could not be penetrated by another of equal status, nor by a male of lower status. In the Middle Assyrian Laws, status, coercion, and repeated acts of receptivity appear to play a part in constructing the boundaries between sanctioned and prohibited behaviors among men.⁵³ In contrast, Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 ban all male couplings involving anal penetration, seemingly those coerced and those voluntary; those with men of higher status, equal status, or lower status; those with men of one's own community or another community.⁵⁴ The comprehensive character of the prohibitions appears to antedate the activity of the final H redactors; there is no evidence that the two formulations were ever anything but general in scope. Why might status concerns and the element of coercion have played no part in the laws of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 at any stage in their development? Why should the proscription presumably apply to all possible couplings involving anal penetration? For the reconstructed penultimate stage, we can only speculate; for the final casting, more can be said. Two approaches seem potentially fruitful: (1) examination of the role and rhetoric of status in the Holiness Source outside of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13; and (2) consideration of H's concern to prevent the defilement of the land of Israel.

Israelite legal collections, including the Holiness Source, recognize elements of social stratification in the community: the slave is mentioned alongside the freeborn and the freed; the poor are mentioned in contrast to "you," members of the community of male landowners addressed by such legal collections as Deut. 12–26 and Exod. 20:22–23:33. Legal materials also tend to affirm the inferiority of women to men.⁵⁵ However, a rhetoric of inclusivity permeates much of H's material, particularly in the discourse sections framing the laws: there is one law for all, for the native-born as well as the resident alien (Lev. 24:22). The rhetorical contrast of native-born Israelite versus resident alien⁵⁶ probably serves as an

⁵³As mentioned previously, it is possible that community membership rather than status is the key to understanding this restriction.

⁵⁴Contrast Boswell (n. 2 above), p. 101, n. 34, who speculates that the laws were possibly meant to restrict only cultic prostitution. There is no evidence to support this idea.

⁵⁵A woman was viewed as the property first of her father and later of her husband; examples illustrating her legal status abound in texts of the Hebrew Bible (see, e.g., Exod. 20:17 // Deut. 5:21).

⁵⁶The rhetorical contrast occurs many times throughout the Holiness Source in a number of forms: native-born/resident alien (Lev. 17:8, 10–12, 13, 15–16; 18:26; 19:3; 24:16, etc.); Israelite/resident alien (Lev. 17:8, 10, 12, 13; 20:2; 22:18, etc.). Compare the Deu-

inclusion encompassing at minimum all free male residents of the land (and their families, where applicable).⁵⁷ If status does not have an impact on legal formulation in the Holiness Source, if there is truly one law for all as H claims, then this may be one reason why the prohibition of male-male intercourse in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 is general, apparently unrelated to the status of the insertive and receptive partners. If the freeborn and the freed, the native-born and the resident alien all enjoy equal status under the law, a prohibition of any sort would necessarily be addressed to all free male residents of Israel without exception. It would not be possible to proscribe certain activities for one group (say, native-born free Israelites) and sanction the same activities for another (say, resident aliens) living under the same law. The comprehensiveness of the proscriptions in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 is evident in the choice of terms employed: Lev. 18:22 addresses the landowner (“you” m.s.),⁵⁸ and forbids penetration of “a male” (general term) rather than prohibiting intercourse with “your neighbor”⁵⁹ (i.e., one of equal status; a more particular restriction). The law avoids particulars, remaining general in scope. The companion law in Lev. 20:13 is also framed in general terms (“a man . . . with a male”). Again, the neighbor is not mentioned, for the social status of the receptive partner plays no role in shaping the interdiction. In the final form of Lev. 18 and 20, issues of defilement are

teronomistic inclusive idiom “bond or free” (Deut. 32:36; 1 Kings 14:10, 21:21; 2 Kings 9:8, 14:26).

⁵⁷Some material in the Holiness Source suggests that slaves were excepted from the one law notion; it appears that different laws applied to them in certain situations. In Lev. 19:20–22, a man has intercourse with a slave betrothed to another man. In contrast to Deut. 22:22; 22:23–24; 22:25–27, where the penalties for intercourse with a betrothed virgin or the wife of another man are severe (execution for the man in all cases; for the woman in all but one case), such coupling with a slave who is not yet freed results in a relatively light penalty for the man (a guilt offering), and no apparent penalty for the woman. Leviticus 19:20 makes it clear that the slave’s status requires a less severe penalty than death for both parties: “They shall not be put to death, for she was not (yet) freed.” There is certainly a tension between the particular law in Lev. 19:20–22 and the rhetoric of inclusivity found most frequently in the framing materials of H. Either this law contradicts the notion of one law for all, or the slave is an exception, with a separate status.

⁵⁸See the earlier discussion of direct address in Israelite legal materials at the beginning of Sec. II. The laws tend to address directly the landed heads of households when they make use of direct address (“you” m.s.); women, minors, resident aliens, and others are mentioned in the third person, when mentioned at all.

⁵⁹Hebrew *rēaʿ*, presumably one of equal status, a fellow landowner (cf. the *tappāʿu* of the MAL, and see the list of the neighbor’s potential possessions in Exod. 20:17 [// Deut. 5:21], which includes house, wife, slaves, and draught animals). Laws referring specifically to injuries done to the neighbor and/or his property are abundant in biblical legal materials (e.g., Exod. 20:16, 17 [// Deut. 5:20, 21]; 21:14; 22 *passim*), including H (Lev. 19:13, 16, 18; 20:10).

clearly paramount. But at an earlier stage in the development of these laws, perhaps the idea of legal inclusivity, now evidenced in the rhetoric of the final form of H, played a role. On this, only speculation is possible; scholars know nothing of the prehistory of this rhetoric and ideology and nothing of the social context in which the laws of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 emerged. But I am assuming that the laws emerged in some proto-H social context and that the ideology and rhetoric of inclusivity also had a prehistory in H communities. Certainly, in the final redaction of this material, the pronounced concern to avoid defilement of the land is well-served by laws that were already comprehensive in character, for whatever reason.

III

A number of recent commentators have wrestled with the laws of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, generally as part of an attempt to make sense of the constellation of sexual proscriptions attested in Lev. 18 and 20. Some scholars have been inclined to explore how the laws of Lev. 18 and 20 function as a group and to suggest what if anything unites them. In practice, commentators have tended to focus on the final form of the text, with little or no attention to issues of textual development over time. Certainly, the arrangement of the laws in Lev. 18 and 20 as they now exist ought to be a focus of interpreters: even if individual laws or groups of laws had a prehistory, they function within their final setting in a particular way, and this must be considered. But the laws of Lev. 18 and 20 must also be analyzed with reference to the larger Holiness Source and its distinct rhetoric and ideology, though in practice this is rarely done. Finally, the development of the individual laws and the legal collections in Lev. 18 and 20 over time cannot be ignored. It seems clear that individual laws or groupings of laws each have their own history, as do larger collections of laws.⁶⁰

Several distinct approaches to understanding the meaning of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 in their final form are to be found in recent interpretive literature. One way of understanding these prohibitions emphasizes alleged connections with so-called idolatry.⁶¹ Another approach utilizes Mary Douglas's arguments in "The Abominations of Leviticus" with regard to prohibited animals, arguing that male-male anal intercourse is

⁶⁰On this, see further Westbrook (n. 27 above), p. 55.

⁶¹Snaith (n. 4 above), p. 126; and Boswell, p. 100. Boswell speculates that the laws might have been meant to proscribe cult prostitution rather than noncultic, homoerotic behaviors (p. 101, n. 34). He assumes such prostitution existed in non-Yahwistic sanctuaries (his "pagan"; see his discussion of the *qādēš*, pp. 98–99). As mentioned in n. 6 above, this assumption is questionable.

forbidden because the receptive male does not conform to his class (male).⁶² A third view sees the wasting of male seed in nonprocreative acts as the central concern in the sexual laws of Lev. 18 and 20, including 18:22 and 20:13.⁶³ Finally, it has been argued that the mixing of otherwise defiling emissions is at issue in several of these sexual proscriptions.⁶⁴ Each of these approaches focuses entirely on the meaning of the prohibitions in their final form, with greater or lesser attention given to the wider chapter context; the possibility that these laws had a prehistory before the activity of the final H tradents and redactors—and thus possibly a different meaning in an earlier context—either is never raised or is given insufficient attention. In this section of the article, I will consider each of these approaches and develop my own position on the meaning(s) of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 in their final chapter and wider H settings.

The “idolatry” approach of N. H. Snaith and John Boswell to understanding Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 is probably the least convincing of the four to be discussed. It depends on the presence of Lev. 18:21, which refers to child sacrifice to an alleged god Molek,⁶⁵ and/or on a restricted and inaccurate understanding of *tô’ēbâ*, the so-called abomination, a word that occurs in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 with reference to the male-male intercourse described and in the framing materials of 18:26–30 with reference to all the violations enumerated in the chapter. It is very likely that Lev. 18:21 is secondary to the series of laws in 18:19–23, attracted by the presence of a shared idiom and key word in verse 20.⁶⁶ Leviticus 18:21 prohibits child sacrifice to an alleged god Molek, where surrounding laws in verses 19–20 and 22–23 all refer to prohibited sex-

⁶²Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (1966; reprint, Harmondsworth, 1970), pp. 54–72; Thurston (n. 4 above), pp. 15–16.

⁶³Eilberg-Schwartz (n. 4 above), p. 183; Biale (n. 4 above), p. 29.

⁶⁴Bigger (n. 4 above), pp. 202–3, on several laws in Lev. 18:19–23. His argument is not effectively applied to 18:22; see my treatment ahead.

⁶⁵It is highly unlikely that the noun *mōlek* was ever the name of a god; on the contrary, there is reason to believe it was a technical sacrificial term associated specifically with cults of child sacrifice in the Northwest Semitic cultural sphere. The major corpus of relevant comparative evidence hails from Punic North Africa. See further O. Eissfeldt, *Molk als Opferbegriff im Punischen und Hebräischen und das Ende des Gottes Molech* (Halle, 1935); and L. Stager, “The Rite of Child Sacrifice at Carthage,” in *New Light on Ancient Carthage*, ed. J. G. Pedley (Ann Arbor, MI, 1980), pp. 1–11.

⁶⁶The key word is *zera*, “seed,” which occurs in verse 20 as well as verse 21; the idiom is *lō’ tittēn*, which is also found in both verses. Cases of attraction resulting from shared idioms or key words are ubiquitous in biblical literature, including legal materials. The Molek prohibition of Lev. 18:21 is paralleled by a far more detailed formulation in Lev. 20:2–6. The proscription in 20:2–6 precedes the introductory framework material of the chapter, suggesting it is secondary there as well: it was probably added after the attraction of verse 21 to chapter 18 for the sake of symmetry between the two chapters.

ual acts. Thus some scholars have argued that the interdiction of Lev. 18:22 has some connection to the prohibition of the worship of gods other than Yahweh, the god of Israel (i.e., to so-called idolatry). Another reason frequently given for making the connection between Lev. 18:22 and the worship of other gods is the presence of the word *tô'ēbâ*, the so-called abomination, in the legal formulations of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 and the H framework materials of Lev. 18 (verses 26–30). But *tô'ēbâ* is not restricted to descriptions of non-Yahwistic cults or even cult activity per se; on the contrary, it has a broad usage that may vary from source to source, and its use in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 tells us little, except that the acts described in those verses are boundary violations of some sort.⁶⁷ In short, neither Lev. 18:21 nor the presence of *tô'ēbâ* in 18:22 and 20:13 provide convincing evidence that male-male intercourse is proscribed because it is associated with the worship of other gods.

Thomas M. Thurston's approach to understanding Lev. 18:22 is interesting, and worthy of serious consideration. After asserting without argument that the law refers to anal intercourse, he develops Douglas's paradigm by applying it to Lev. 18:22. Douglas had argued that there is a pattern to be discerned in the dietary laws of Lev. 11 and Deut. 14: every living creature should conform to the characteristics of its class and those that do not are forbidden to Israelites. Thurston argues that Lev. 18:22 is best understood in the same way; the prohibition is present because the receptive male in anal intercourse does not conform to his class (male as opposed to female): boundaries are blurred when a male plays the receptive role. Thurston is correct to assume that the law refers to anal intercourse and not to other sexual activities, and there is much to be said for introducing the issue of the gendering of sexual acts. After all, the fact that the receptive partner is not addressed directly in Lev. 18:22 suggests that he was probably viewed as the legal equivalent of a woman, as I have argued. But there are problems with this approach. The law in Lev. 18:22 addresses directly only the insertive partner in a male coupling. In 20:13 the receptive partner is mentioned together with the insertive partner in the punishment section, but so awkwardly that I suspect he was added at some stage during the development of these laws. Originally, both formulations apparently focused only on the insertive partner; there is no evidence that the receptive partner was ever the central focus of these laws. Given the lack of focus on the receptive partner, it seems unlikely that the laws were ever motivated by a concern that the anally receptive male conform to his class.

S. F. Bigger and H. Eilberg-Schwartz have each contributed to the broader discussion of the shape and shaping of Lev. 18 and 20, and each

⁶⁷ See further my discussion of *tô'ēbâ* and its uses in n. 3 above.

has developed an interpretive paradigm for understanding how these legal collections function. Bigger published his article on Lev. 18 in 1979.⁶⁸ In it, he observed that Lev. 18 could be divided into two parts: verses 7–18, concerning incest violations, and verses 19–23, which bring together other sexual crimes. He spends the majority of the article on the incest proscriptions but has some interesting comments to make about verses 19–23. Bigger argues that these verses are all concerned with maintaining the “sexual purity of the individual.” He suggests, though not very boldly, that each violation involves a “misuse of semen”: in this series of laws, semen is mixed with other human semen; animal semen; or other defiling fluids, leading to uncleanness. In verse 19, a man is forbidden from having intercourse with a menstruant; Bigger points out that “both semen and menstrual blood were defiling on their own, and mingled together these presented a double threat.”⁶⁹ Verse 20 involves “non-group adultery”; Bigger suggests that the commingling of the semen of two different men (husband/adulterer) may have been the reason for this prohibition.⁷⁰ Verse 21, which prohibits child sacrifice, has but a tenuous connection to the rest of the material in Bigger’s view.⁷¹ Bigger claims that verse 22, concerning the male-male coupling, also involves the misuse of semen, but nowhere explains how it is misused. Finally, verse 23 forbids human-quadruped couplings in two laws. Bigger draws attention to the word *tebel*, “confusion” or “mixing,” used in verse 23 to describe the coupling of quadruped and woman in intercourse; he suggests that this confusion “may have referred to the mixing of different types of semen in the receptive animal or woman, or the confusion of species and social roles.”⁷² The former explanation is more consistent with his observations about the other proscriptions: with regard to the laws of verses 19–20, he suggested that the mixing of defiling fluids was at issue. The notion of forbidden mixings, suggested by the word *tebel* in Lev. 18:23 and 20:12, was elaborated in some detail with reference to the dietary laws by Douglas.⁷³ Curiously, Bigger did not cite Douglas, though he too emphasized mixing/confusion as an underlying theme in Lev. 18.⁷⁴ Bigger’s idea that it is prohibited to bring defiling fluids into contact is striking and may indeed underlie each of these pro-

⁶⁸Bigger, pp. 187–203.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹*Ibid.* See my earlier discussion.

⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁷³Douglas (n. 62 above), pp. 54–72.

⁷⁴Bigger (n. 4 above) was not the first to suggest that concern about the mixing of semen might lie behind several of these prohibitions. In his commentary on the word *tebel* (“mixing”) in verse 23, Rashi spoke of mixing human and animal semen; regarding verse

scribed couplings; it needs to be considered seriously, especially because a rhetoric forbidding mixing is present in two of the laws in Lev. 18 and 20 (18:23; 20:12), and Lev. 19:19 as well.⁷⁵

Eilberg-Schwartz, in a discussion of menstrual blood and other defiling fluids, briefly considered what might tie together the laws of Lev. 18.⁷⁶ He argued that all of the acts listed in Lev. 18, including the law of verse 21 forbidding child sacrifice to an alleged god Molech, are interdicted because they "pose a threat to the integrity of the Israelite lineage." He continues: "Incest violations and adultery pervert and obscure lines of descent. By the same token, homosexuality, bestiality performed by a man, and offering one's children to Molech waste Israelite seed. . . . The same is true of sexual relations with a menstruating woman. . . . It is true that when a woman has intercourse with an animal, Israelite seed is not wasted. But since this sexual act cannot result in conception, it too is considered a 'perversion.'"⁷⁷ In a recent contribution to the interpretation of the laws of Lev. 18 and 20, D. Biale, following Eilberg-Schwartz, proposed that the laws in question all proscribe acts that threaten procreation or its results (i.e., living children) or do not lead to it: "What unifies all these acts is that they are considered affronts to procreation, either because they are sterile (homosexuality and bestiality), produce illegitimate progeny (adultery, incest), destroy progeny (sacrifice to Molech), or represent rebellion against the source of one's own legitimacy (insulting one's parents)."⁷⁸

Bigger and Eilberg-Schwartz each consider the law of Lev. 18:22 in the context of wider discussions of the laws of chapter 18. Bigger claims that male-male intercourse discussed in Lev. 18:22 is forbidden because it constitutes "misuse of semen," but he does not elaborate, and it remains unclear to the reader precisely what he meant by this. Eilberg-Schwartz, followed by Biale, seems to understand Lev. 18:22 to prohibit all types of male-male sex; he argues that such acts "waste seed," not unlike a male having intercourse with a menstruating woman, or a man coupling with a female quadruped, acts that would produce no off-

20, the Vulgate's rendering suggests a concern for semen mixing. See further Snaith (n. 4 above), pp. 125–26, who cites these texts and finds this approach plausible.

⁷⁵Where interbreeding quadrupeds, sowing two kinds of seed in one field, and making garments with two kinds of stuff are prohibited. Compare Deut. 22:9–11, which parallels the list in Lev. 19:19 but with slight differences.

⁷⁶Eilberg-Schwartz (n. 4 above), p. 183.

⁷⁷Ibid. In this instance, as in the case of "mixing" semen, premodern interpreters anticipate the arguments of moderns. The medieval commentator Nahmanides suggested that both male-male and human-animal couplings were prohibited because they do not lead to procreation.

⁷⁸Biale (n. 4 above), p. 29.

spring. Bigger focuses attention on the notion of “mixing” as an underlying theme uniting a number of the prohibitions of Lev. 18; Eilberg-Schwartz argues that the laws share in common the idea of defending the lineage from various potential threats, including the wasting of male seed by means of acts that do not lead to procreation. Bigger’s theory is appealing and is anchored in the vocabulary and conceptual universe of the text itself, but his treatment of Lev. 18:22 is wholly inadequate. He does not show how the “misuse of semen” in Lev. 18:22 relates to the various mixings of defiling emissions he identifies in the laws of Lev. 18:19, 20, 23, or any other kind of mixing for that matter. Eilberg-Schwartz’s presentation is more thoroughgoing and bolder than is Bigger’s; he integrates his interpretation of Lev. 18:22 into his wider theoretical discussion quite well, but the theory itself, though systematically presented, is not anchored in the conceptual universe of the text. Eilberg-Schwartz does not contend with the notion of “mixing” (*tebel*), mentioned in both Lev. 18:23 and 20:12. Yet surely “mixing” must have some relation to the ideas undergirding Lev. 18 and 20 in their final form; it may in fact be a primary organizing notion. Furthermore, Eilberg-Schwartz assumes that all male-male sexual acts are proscribed by Lev. 18:22, but this is clearly not the case: only intercourse is interdicted. Sexual acts other than intercourse between males—and between males and females—waste seed; they are nonproductive of offspring, and yet they are not prohibited by these laws. The laws concerning sexual couplings all seem to refer specifically to intercourse.⁷⁹ This suggests to me that a concern for productive sexual relations might not underlie the laws of Lev. 18 in their final form. If it did, one might expect other genital acts that result in ejaculation but do not lead to conception to be proscribed.

Bigger was correct to observe that a number of the sexual acts prohibited in Lev. 18:19–23 involve the possible mixing of otherwise defiling bodily emissions: semen and menstrual blood in a menstruating woman (Lev. 18:19); the semen of two different men in a receptive woman who commits adultery (Lev. 18:20); and human semen and animal semen in a receptive woman or female animal in cases of human-animal coupling (Lev. 18:23). The problem is Lev. 18:22, where two men have intercourse. Bigger stated that semen here is “misused,” but never made clear what he meant. Could Lev. 18:22 be another case of avoiding the mixing of otherwise defiling bodily emissions, as in Lev. 18:19–20, 23? Like menstrual blood and semen, excrement defiles in certain purity construc-

⁷⁹The various idioms used suggest this: “to uncover the nakedness of”; “to take”; “to approach to uncover nakedness”; “to lie with”; “to set your effusion in”; “to stand before (in order) to copulate.”

tions, including that of Ezekiel, who is widely viewed as sharing H's purity system (in other words, Ezekiel belonged to the Holiness School).⁸⁰ I will assume from Ezek. 4:9–15 that excrement defiles in H circles, even though this is not evidenced in the Holiness Source itself. If excrement pollutes in H's purity ideology, the reason for the proscription of male-male intercourse in the final form of H's work might then be to prevent two otherwise defiling agents—excrement and semen—from mingling in the body of the receptive partner.⁸¹ As Bigger and many others have observed, the various sexual acts enumerated in Lev. 18 and 20 lead to defilement of the individual in the final, highly redacted form of those chapters; uncleanness must be avoided according to H framework materials in chapters 18 and 20 for the land of Israel must be kept free of defilement so that Israel may dwell there, avoiding expulsion.⁸² In the final form of the Holiness Source, male-male anal intercourse may have been proscribed in order to prevent the mixing of two otherwise defiling substances, and thereby prevent the defilement of the land of Israel.

According to P, any ejaculatory act renders a man and his female sexual partner unclean until evening (Lev. 15:16–18). Defilement must be kept apart from the sanctuary/desert camp, where Yahweh is thought to be present. So an unclean person must avoid the sanctuary sphere until he or she is clean. But according to H, the whole land of Israel—like the sanctuary according to the purity constructions of P and other biblical sources—must be protected from pollution.⁸³ The purity system of H, in contrast to other biblical ideologies, erects a boundary around the whole land, treating it as holy and in need of protection. Yet surely H does not demand an end to all ejaculatory acts and other events of the life cycle that are defiling (e.g., birth, menstruation) in order to avoid contamination of the land of Israel! Because the threat of the mixing of two otherwise defiling emissions may well link together the nonincest sexual laws of chapters 18 and 20, perhaps the H tradents responsible

⁸⁰See specifically Ezek. 4:9–15. Zechariah 3:1–5, another text in which excrement defiles, may also reflect this construction of purity. Compare Deut. 23:13–15; 2 Kings 10:27, and the Temple Scroll from Qumran (11QTemp 46:13–16) for such associations in other, non-H, purity contexts. On the symbolism of excremental defilement, see further the discussion of B. Halpern, "The Excremental Vision: The Doomed Priests of Doom in Isaiah 28," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986): 109–21.

⁸¹A possible problem with this thesis has been pointed out to me by David Konstan (December 8, 1993): if the avoidance of mixing two defiling agents in the body of a receptive partner were the motive, why is there no ban on anal intercourse with a woman? In response, I note that anal intercourse with a woman is not attested in any Israelite context. Possibly it was not part of the Israelite repertoire of sexual acts. Nevertheless, I note the potential difficulty.

⁸²See Lev. 18:24–30; 20:22–26.

⁸³See further Milgrom, *Leviticus* (n. 1 above), pp. 13–51, on views of purity in H and P.

for the final form of chapters 18 and 20 believed that only the mixing of such defiling emissions was threatening to the purity of the land.⁸⁴ Perhaps menstruation, parturition, ejaculation, and other events causing defilement according to P were only mildly defiling according to H, unthreatening to the continued presence of Israel in the land as long as no mixing with other defiling emissions was involved. That H has nothing to say about these sources of uncleanness apart from mixings is probably telling in itself. How did P view such mixings? The Priestly Source seems significantly less threatened by them: where H would cut off from the community a man and a menstruating woman who have intercourse (Lev. 20:18), P simply states that they are each unclean for seven days (Lev. 15:24).

IV

What can be concluded from this investigation? The laws of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, with their opaque idiom *miškēbê 'iššâ*, concern specifically the act of intercourse between two males; they do not refer to other sexual acts. This interpretation has been assumed by some commentators past and present but has never before been demonstrated philologically to my knowledge. Leviticus 18:22 addresses directly only the insertive partner, and Lev. 20:13 begins by mentioning only him in the third person; the receptive partner, very likely viewed as the legal equivalent of a woman, is not addressed directly by these laws. Furthermore, there is good reason to suspect that, at an earlier stage in the development of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, only the insertive partner was punished, in contrast to the final form of these laws in which both partners are subject to execution. Why only the insertive partner, and why the proscription? The penetrator may have been viewed before the final H casting as the only active agent and thus the only one culpable, condemned possibly for causing the “feminization” of his partner. Or he may have also been seen as someone committing an act construed as an assault (cf. MAL A 20), though there is no evidence to suggest this. Another possible approach is that the insertive partner may have been viewed as not conforming to his class because of his choice of partner.⁸⁵ In any case, the insertive part-

⁸⁴The incest laws (Lev. 18:7–18) have their own complex history of transmission, as a number of other commentators have argued (e.g., Bigger [n. 4 above], pp. 196–202). The semen-mixing thesis will work for some of these (e.g., Lev. 18:7, 8, 14, 15, 16), but not necessarily others (e.g., Lev. 18:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17). We could assume that all of the potential female partners mentioned in verses 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 17 are otherwise married, but that is not stated and does not seem to be the reason for the proscriptions.

⁸⁵Here I modify Thurston's application (n. 4 above) of Douglas (n. 62 above), discussed previously.

ner is the focus of the laws in their penultimate form, and his action is described as a boundary violation (tô'ēbâ). The laws in their penultimate form viewed the receptive partner as the legal equivalent of a woman: he is not addressed directly; he is very likely seen as a patient rather than an agent; he is viewed as "feminized"; he is not deserving of punishment (cf. MAL A 20).

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 prohibit male-male intercourse without qualification, in contrast to other ancient cultures, where status, coercion, and other issues play a role in the bounding of licit and illicit sexual behavior between men. It may be that H's ideology and rhetoric of inclusivity contributed to the shaping of these laws as general prohibitions in their penultimate stage, though this must remain a speculation. Certainly purity considerations unique to H are predominant in the final casting of Lev. 18 and 20. The laws of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 in their final setting may well be part of a wider effort to prevent the mixing of semen and other defiling agents in the bodies of receptive women, men, and animals, mixings that result in defilement of the individuals involved. The primary concern of H tradents responsible for framework materials in chapters 18 and 20 is preserving the purity of the land, which itself is threatened by the defiling sexual acts enumerated in Lev. 18 and 20. Intercourse between two males, like intercourse with a menstruant, adultery, incest, and bestiality, threatens to defile the land in the final form of Lev. 18 and 20. All male-male intercourse couplings are proscribed because all such couplings would threaten the purity of the land according to the H tradents responsible for framework materials.

Did Israelites abhor male couplings, as has been generally assumed up to the present? Certainly the evidence of the Hebrew Bible is insufficient to support this view. Such a generalization is more easily defended for adultery, incest, and human-animal couplings, all of which are prohibited in legal materials outside of the Holiness Source. But intercourse between males is mentioned in no other Israelite legal setting. Though the origin of the proscriptions is opaque, in the final form of H they cannot be separated from purity-related concerns.⁸⁶ Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 appear to prohibit intercourse exclusively, while ignoring other

⁸⁶In his recent discussion of homoeroticism (his "homosexuality") in ancient Israel, Greenberg (n. 3 above), like others before him, raises the possibility that Persian influence might have been responsible for the presence of these laws in Leviticus: "The homosexual prohibition of Leviticus could have had a Zoroastrian source" (p. 192). This argument is difficult to accept for a number of reasons: (1) The laws apparently had a complex history predating the work of the final H tradents, which themselves are not necessarily postexilic (i.e., Persian period) in provenance; there is no agreement on the antiquity of H, but many specialists would date at least portions to the period before the Babylonian exile, and Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 certainly antedate the final stages of redaction. Thus, they may well be

potential sexual acts between males. For the laws in their final setting, this is best explained with reference to the distinct purity concerns articulated in the H framework materials: other sexual acts between men, in contrast to intercourse, are unthreatening to the purity of the land because they do not involve the mixing of two otherwise defiling emissions in the body of a receptive partner. This observation also helps to explain the frequently observed lack in H of an analogous law to Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 regarding women. In a coupling of two women, there is no threat of defilement by means of the commingling two otherwise polluting substances in the body of a receptive partner. The reason for the generation of the laws of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 remains unclear, though the act of the penetrator was certainly the focus of concern from the beginning. Perhaps the insertive partner was originally condemned as a boundary violator because his act “feminized” his partner or because he did not conform to his class (male) when he chose another male as a partner in intercourse.

preexilic themselves. (2) There is no evidence that purity concerns are a borrowing from the Persian sphere, though this is what Greenberg seems to imply (p. 192); on the contrary, concern for defilement is evident in early biblical materials (including defilement from corpses, cited by Greenberg as evidence for “Iranian influence”). Sources which most specialists date to the tenth through eighth centuries B.C.E. bear witness to purity concerns: see, e.g., J (Gen. 7:2–3; 8:20); predeuteronomistic materials in Samuel and Kings (1 Sam. 21; 2 Sam. 3:29; 5:8; 11; 2 Kings 10:27); and deuteronomistic materials (Deut. 14; 15:21; 17:1; 23:12–14; 2 Kings 23 *passim*).



Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: Who Is Doing What to Whom?

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LEVITICUS 18:22 AND 20:13: WHO IS DOING WHAT TO WHOM?

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In a 1994 article in the *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Saul M. Olyan made major contributions to the understanding of Lev 18:22 and 20:13.¹ First, he demonstrated by a convincing philological analysis that the laws refer specifically to male–male anal intercourse, not to male–male sexual contact in general.² Second, he showed that the redaction history of this legislation is essential to its interpretation. Beyond this, Olyan compared Israelite attitudes toward male–male intercourse with those of other ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures. Finally, he sought to understand the laws in their final form and context in the Holiness Code, that is, as part of the complex of sexual proscriptions codified in Lev 18 and 20. The purpose of the present essay is twofold. First, since Olyan's article appeared in a journal not regularly consulted by biblical scholars, I hope to bring his insights to the attention of those who might otherwise overlook them. More importantly, I wish to build further on Olyan's philological foundations and, in so doing, to propose sociological and interpretive conclusions quite different from those he himself reached.

I

Olyan's philological contribution is to establish the meaning of the phrase **מִשְׁכָּב זָכָר**, which occurs in the Hebrew Bible only in these two verses. The key to understanding the phrase lies in the correlative phrase **מִשְׁכָּב אִשָּׁה**, found in

¹ Saul M. Olyan, "‘And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman’: On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1994): 179–206.

² As is widely recognized, the Hebrew Bible says nothing at all about female–female sexuality. For a brief survey of the limited talmudic evidence, see Daniel Boyarin, "Are There Any Jews in ‘The History of Sexuality?’" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1995): 339–40.

Num 31:17–18, 35, and Judg 21:11–12. These passages distinguish between women who are virgins and those who are not; the difference is that the latter have known *זכר משכב* or *איש למשכב זכר* and the former have not. From this Olyan rightly understands that *משכב זכר*, the “lying down of a male,” refers specifically to vaginal penetration by a male. Therefore he infers that the correlative *אשה משכב* means “the act or condition of a woman’s being penetrated” or “vaginal receptivity.” The legislation of Lev 18:22 and 20:13, then, which prohibits a man from “lying with a male the lying down of a woman” has in view sexual (anal) penetration of one man by another, on the analogy of sexual (vaginal) penetration of a woman by a man.³

Olyan argues that the Levitical laws are addressed in the first instance to the active or penetrative partner. He cites traditional interpretations in support (*m. Sanh.* 7:14; *m. Ker.* 1:1; Rashi on Lev 20:13) and dismisses the alternative as “less likely, since it appears that *miškēbê ’iššā* is what a male experiences in vaginal intercourse, and the law stipulates that ‘you’ (m.s.) shall not experience it with a male” (p. 186). This point, which we will reexamine critically below, is foundational for many of Olyan’s subsequent conclusions.

Both formulations of the Levitical law condemn the one who “lies the lying down of a woman,” but, unlike 18:22, Lev 20:13 imposes punishment upon both parties to the act. Olyan points out the awkwardness of the verse’s syntax and argues that 20:13 originally had in mind the same person as 18:22 (in Olyan’s view, the insertive partner), and that the abrupt shift from singular (“the man who . . .”) to plural (“they—the two of them”) is a later redactional expansion by the compiler of the Holiness Code. Traces of similar development can be seen in several of the laws in Lev 20.

When Olyan compares Israelite legislation in the Holiness Code to what is attested in other ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures, he finds significant contrasts.⁴ In Israel as elsewhere the distinction between active and receptive sexual roles was conditioned by gender. But in other cultures factors such as status and age also contributed to defining the sexual role appropriate for a particular individual, whereas this was not the case in Israel. In ancient

³ Olyan comments that the correlation of *זכר/אשה* is unexpected. “Why *zākār* is paired with *’iššā* instead of *nēqēbā* or *’iššā* with *zākār* instead of *’iš* is not at all clear” (“And with a Male,” 185).

⁴ On male–male sexuality in the ancient world, Olyan cites the works of K. J. Dover, D. M. Halperin, J. J. Winkler, and A. Richlin. To these add David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin, eds., *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Wayne R. Dynes and Stephen Donaldson, eds., *Homosexuality in the Ancient World* (Studies in Homosexuality 1; New York: Garland, 1992), which reprints numerous relevant articles from preceding decades; and most recently Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998). On the material above, see particularly Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 57–73.

Greece and Rome, male–male sexuality took several forms, though the range of what was acceptable differed in the two cultures. In Greece, for example, sexual relations between master and slave were considered improper, whereas they were accepted in Rome. The difference was that in Greece sexual intercourse between males was expected to involve two people of the same social class, where the opposite was the case: in Rome the active and passive roles in the relationship required that the two men be of different social rank. In Greece, sexual relationships between older men and younger free citizens were accepted; generally they were affectionate and pedagogical, and frequently lasted several years. Both men were of the same class, but the active and passive roles could be assigned to the adult and the younger man on the basis of their respective ages.⁵ In Rome, such relationships were not condoned, precisely because both men were of the same social class. It was considered improper for a free male citizen of whatever age to accept a passive sexual role.

Furthermore, addressing the law to the active party rather than to the passive one differentiates the Israelite evidence sharply from Greek and Roman practice and perhaps also from Assyrian. In Greece and Rome it was primarily the passive role that was the object of social and legal opprobrium, though in Rome the active party too would have been condemned if his partner were an adult male citizen. Assyrian evidence is not entirely clear (see Middle Assyrian Law A 19–20), but seems to condemn the active party only in cases of coercion.⁶ Such patterns are typical of societies where honor and shame are foundational social values: attitudes toward male–male sexual intercourse are less based on a social construction of relational sexuality (that is, that sexual activity is proper to gender-differenced partners and not to same-gender partners) than on the social construction of masculinity (that is, that status-superior males penetrate and are not penetrated). However, that is not the pattern Olyan discerns in Israel. For him, the Levitical laws “ban all male couplings involving anal penetration, seemingly those coerced and those voluntary; those with men of higher status, equal status, or lower status; those with men of one’s own com-

⁵ It may be significant that Greek pictorial representations of sexual contact between the ἐραστής (the older partner) and the ἐρόμενος (the younger) never suggest anal penetration of the latter. The typical form of intimate contact is intercrural intercourse. The emotional dimensions of the relationship are likewise not cast in clear dominant/submissive categories either: the *erastēs/eromenos* relationship represented a transitional stage in the development of a Greek male citizen from child (*pais*) to free adult and distinguished him from the slave, who remained a *pais* all his life unless freed (see Mark Golden, “Slavery and Homosexuality at Athens,” *Phoenix* 38 [1984]: 308–24; reprinted in *Homosexuality in the Ancient World*, ed. Dynes and Donaldson, 162–78).

⁶ See the edition of Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (SBLWAW 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

munity or another community" (p. 195). He opines that this comprehensive prohibition predated the redaction of the Holiness Code, but sees no way to determine why this should have been so. For the Holiness Code itself, he points to a "rhetoric of inclusivity" that applies much of H's legal material univocally to all (except slaves), to native born and resident alien, to landed and landless, to freeborn and freed.

Finally Olyan surveys several opinions about why male–male intercourse would be numbered among the sexual proscriptions of Lev 18 and 20. He rightly rejects the idea that the proscribed actions are all connected with idolatry. He is equally unconvinced that the practice is forbidden because the receptive man's behavior does not conform to the class "male"; in this case, says Olyan, one would expect the laws to address the receptive partner directly, rather than the active one. Following S. Bigger, he suggests that the purity of the land of Israel is threatened by any act that mixes two separate, potentially defiling bodily fluids in the same receptacle: human and animal semen (Lev 18:23; 20:15–16); semen and menstrual blood (Lev 18:19; 20:18); the semen of two different men (Lev 18:20; 20:10). In the case of male–male anal intercourse, the mixture of semen and excrement (defiling, according to Ezek 4:9–15) would threaten to defile the land of Israel.⁷

II

Olyan's argument that the laws refer specifically to a penetrative act, and therefore to male–male anal intercourse, is surely correct.⁸ The binary opposition of *זכר* and *משכב אשה* is clear, even if the reason for the odd correlation of *זכר* and *אשה* is not.⁹ On the other hand, Olyan's confidence that the laws

⁷ Olyan acknowledges that this reasoning would weigh equally against male–female anal intercourse, which is nowhere prohibited in the Hebrew Bible. He speculates that "possibly it was not part of the Israelite repertoire of sexual acts." See, however, the discussion of Jer 13:22b in F. Rachel Magdalene, "Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses and the Ultimate Texts of Terror," in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 328–29 n. 4. For the talmudic recognition of male–female anal intercourse, see Boyarin, "Are There Any Jews," 346–47.

⁸ Boyarin reaches the same conclusion on the basis of an analysis of the talmudic understanding of the Levitical laws. "As the Talmud understood it, male–male sexual practices other than anal intercourse are not prohibited by the Torah . . ." ("Are There Any Jews," 339).

⁹ Another slight anomaly, not mentioned by Olyan, is the discrepancy between singular *משכב* and plural *משכב*. Any attempt to explain the discrepancy is conjectural, but it may have to do with one's physical position vis-à-vis the sexual partner. The penetrative partner, the *זכר*, will face the receptive partner; the receptive partner, on the other hand, has several possible ways of "lying down," ranging from facing toward the *זכר* to facing away from him. Boyarin argues that the Tal-

are addressed in the first instance to the active partner is misplaced. In examining the vocabulary used to describe sexual acts, he treats “to lie with” and “to know” as synonymous and interchangeable. For instance:

Thus, in vaginal intercourse, a woman experiences (idiomatically “knows” or “lies”) *miškab zākār* (male penetration) while presumably she offers her partner *miškēbē ʾiššā* (vaginal receptivity), which he experiences (“knows” or “lies”). (p. 185)

Similarly:

Since both a man and a woman can “know” or “lie” sexually, there is probably no difference in meaning between the two idioms: both mean to experience intercourse. (p. 185 n. 16)

However, the pattern of usage is not as loose as these remarks would indicate. The passages that describe the woman’s experience of *משכב זכר*, that is, of penetrative intercourse by a male, consistently use the verb “to know” (Num 31:17–18, 35; Judg 21:11–12). The woman either “knows the lying down of a male” or “knows a man as to the lying down of a male.” The verb here is equivalent to “experience.” The Levitical laws, by contrast, both speak of a man who “lies . . . the lying down of a woman”—a cognate direct object construction to be compared with such standard Hebrew idioms as “to dream a dream,” “to sin a sin,” and the like. This construction regularly describes an action performed by the subject, not the subject’s experience of someone else’s action.¹⁰ Compare the similar though nonsexual usage in 2 Sam 4:5b: *ויבאו כחם היום אל־בית איש בשת והוא שכב את משכב הצהרים* (“they came to Ish-Bosheth’s house in the heat of the day, while he was lying the lying down of noontime”). The man to whom the laws of Lev 18:22 and 20:13 are addressed, then, is the one who *performs* the “lying down of a woman”—that is, the one who acts as the receptive partner. This is confirmed by the specification that he lies *את־זכר*, “with a male.” Olyan takes “male” as a general term here (p. 196); but this is hardly likely, particularly in a context where *משכבי אשה*, sexual receptivity, is defined by its contrast to *משכב זכר*, sexual penetration. The *זכר* with whom a man is forbidden to lie is the penetrator; the person addressed by the laws is the receptive partner. Thus the phrase *משכב את־זכר* is best translated “to lie with a male as a woman would.”

If this is correct, then several of Olyan’s conclusions must be reassessed. Foremost among them is the claim that Israelite attitudes toward male–male intercourse were fundamentally different from those of other contemporary

mud understands the plural to reflect the fact that there are two kinds of intercourse possible with a woman, vaginal and anal (“Are There Any Jews,” 346–47).

¹⁰ See the discussion of the cognate effected accusative in *IBHS* §10.2.1f.

cultures. As Olyan remarks, Israelite legislation is, by and large, addressed to the free male Israelite citizen. It was his duty to apply the law as appropriate to the various other members of his own household—women, children, slaves, foreigners. Other social classes were not addressed directly by the laws; they were spoken *about*, but they were not spoken *to*. Even H's "rhetoric of inclusivity" is expressed by explicit association rather than by expanding the second person addressee to include other social categories (e.g., "either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you," Lev 18:26). So the laws of Lev 18:22 and 20:13 are addressed to the free male citizen (the "man" of 20:13). They prohibit him from submitting to sexual penetration by a "male," whether social equal or social inferior; and 20:13 considers blameworthy both parties to an act of male–male penetrative intercourse that puts a free male Israelite into the passive role. The language of the laws, therefore, is fully consonant with what we know of other contemporary Mediterranean societies in which an honor/shame dynamic was central to social and sexual behavior. The laws need not imply any broader prohibitions than there would have been, for instance, in Rome.

If the Levitical laws are primarily addressed to the receptive partner, then Olyan's arguments about the reason for the presence of these laws in the Holiness Code must also be reexamined. There are three classes of actions called *הועבה* (conventionally translated "abomination") in Leviticus: violations of the dietary laws, violations of the sexual laws of Lev 18 and 20, and participation in pagan worship. Violations of the sexual laws are branded *הועבה* in general terms in Lev 18:26–30. The laws about male–male sexual intercourse in 18:22 and 20:13 are the only places in these two chapters where the term is applied to a specific action.¹¹ Mary Douglas has argued convincingly that categories of clean and unclean in the dietary laws are determined by whether a creature is a pure example of its type—animal, bird, fish, insect—or crosses boundaries—insects that fly, animals that have hands¹² instead of feet, fish that do not swim with fins, birds that dive into water, and so on.¹³ The underlying motivation of these laws, then, is to respect the separation of creatures into groups according to their kinds—the typical creation theology of the Priestly tradition. In his commentary on Leviticus, Baruch Levine extends that reasoning to the other two classes of *הועבות*, and to the category as a whole.¹⁴ The sexual prohibitions

¹¹ Olyan infers from this that the identification of male–male intercourse as *הועבה* formed part of the earlier formulation of this law, and was extended to all the laws of Lev 18 by later redactors who created the framing materials in 18:24–30.

¹² Leviticus 11:27 declares unclean animals that walk on *kappôṭ*, "hands" (NRSV "paws").

¹³ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1966), esp. ch. 7, "The Abominations of Leviticus."

¹⁴ *Leviticus* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 243.

against incest prevent the confusion of two mutually exclusive groups: the group of potential sex partners and the group of kin. The prohibitions against idolatrous worship prevent the confusion of creature with Creator. Together, all three classes of *חֲרִיבָה* protect the boundaries between Israelites, who are to be Yahweh's "holy" people (i.e., "set apart, separate"), and the various peoples surrounding them who, in Israel's view, indulged in all these prohibited dietary, sexual, and cultic practices. Thomas M. Thurston applied Douglas's categories specifically to Lev 18:22: in an act of male-male anal intercourse the boundary between "male" and "female" is being transgressed, since a man is acting in the sexually receptive role proper to a woman.¹⁵ Similar reasoning can be extended as well to the other two instances of sexual category confusion in the immediate context: adultery, which confuses the categories of one's own sexual property and one's neighbor's, and bestiality, which transgresses the boundary between human and animal.

Daniel Boyarin's reasoning in this regard converges with Thurston's.¹⁶ Moreover, since the separation of the categories of male (i.e., penetrator) and female (i.e., penetrated¹⁷) was established in creation, Boyarin infers that issues of shame and gender superiority are not relevant to the prohibition of male-male anal intercourse ("[T]he issue does not seem to have been status so much as an insistence on the absolute inviolability of gender dimorphism"),¹⁸ and therefore that the prohibition was universal. It did not envisage only situations where a free male citizen subjected himself to penetration by another male. Boyarin thus arrives at the same conclusion Olyan reached on the basis of H's "rhetoric of inclusivity." But both scholars overlook the fact that the Levitical laws are all addressed in the first instance to the free male citizen and that these laws specifically forbid that citizen to accept the receptive role.¹⁹ The central issue in both laws is not gender confusion in general, but precisely gender con-

¹⁵ Thomas M. Thurston, "Leviticus 18:22 and the Prohibition of Homosexual Acts," in *Homophobia and the Judaeo-Christian Tradition* (ed. Michael L. Stemmeler and J. Michael Clark; Dallas: Monument, 1990), 7–23. Olyan considers Thurston's interpretation but rejects it because of the laws' "lack of focus on the receptive partner" (p. 199).

¹⁶ Boyarin, "Are There Any Jews," 342. Boyarin was aware of and acknowledged Thurston's work although, at the time of writing, he had not been able to avail himself of it.

¹⁷ Boyarin points out that the Hebrew word for female, *נִקְבָּה*, has reference to the female as "onifice bearer" ("Are There Any Jews," 345).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 348.

¹⁹ There are, in addition, cases where social status clearly mitigates the categories of the created order. The murder of a human being, for instance, is to be punished by shedding the murderer's blood (Gen 9:6; cf. the Levitical formulation in Lev 24:17, 21). Yet when the victim is a "man" (that is, a free citizen), the killer is killed (Exod 21:12); when the victim is a slave, the killer is "punished" (Exod 21:20); and if the slave survives for a short time, the killer is not punished at all, "for the slave is his money" (Exod 21:21).

fusion wherein the *free* male citizen takes on the “female” role. Although the active party is equally responsible for an act of gender confusion, his behavior is not deemed blameworthy until the late redactional expansion of Lev 20:13.

Finally, this reading throws some light on the redactional process that produced the final form of the text in H. For Olyan, since the earlier form of the laws already condemned the active partner, and already exhibited a “rhetoric of inclusivity” that extended the prohibition of male–male intercourse to all males (except perhaps slaves), the only identifiable redactional development is the Holiness Code’s concentration on protecting the purity of the land of Israel. However, if we recognize that the original prohibitions are addressed to the receptive partner, then the redactional addition in 20:13 *extends* the law to inculcate the active party as well. Such a development is a clear illustration of Levine’s analysis of the Priestly notion of תועבה. In the original law, a free adult male citizen who took the receptive role in an act of male–male anal intercourse would have been condemned as transgressing the boundary between male and female, just as he would have been in Greece, Rome, and, apparently, Assyria. Such a law alone would not have made Israelite practice noticeably different from that of other cultures in the Mediterranean basin or the ancient Near East. But by extending the condemnation to include the active party, the redactor of H strives to differentiate between Israelite practice and that of “Egypt” and “Canaan” and “the nation that was before you” (18:3, 24–28), and thereby to protect the holiness of Israel from the תועבה of confusion with other nations.

III

The two legislative texts in Lev 18:22 and 20:13 have very narrow and very precise purview. They envisage one situation only: anal intercourse between two men, one of whom is a free adult Israelite and takes the passive sexual role of being penetrated by the other. The underlying system of social values within which such laws should be understood is the gender construction of maleness in a society where honor and shame are foundational social values. The male sexual role is to be the active penetrator; the passive role of being penetrated brings shame to a man (at least to a free adult male citizen) who engages in it and, in the later redactional stratum, also to the one who penetrates him. Apart from this situation, the Hebrew Bible is silent. Was rape practiced in war as a way of humiliating enemy soldiers, as it has been throughout history?²⁰ Was a

²⁰ The use of anal rape to humiliate conquered enemies is likely in ancient Egypt. See Vern L. Bullough, “Homosexuality as Submissive Behavior: Example from Mythology,” *Journal of Sex Research* 9 (1973): 283–88; reprinted in *Homosexuality in the Ancient World*, ed. Dynes and

male slave available for sexual penetration by the master, as a female slave was? Was sexual intercourse between two male slaves the object of social or legal condemnation? Our texts say nothing that affords any insight into such questions. Moreover, other forms of male–male sexual encounter, encompassing the whole range of physical expressions of affection that do not entail penetration, are not envisaged in these laws.

Donaldson, 69–75. It is clearly reflected in Greek pictorial art. A mid-fifth-century wine jar commemorating an Athenian victory over the Persians at the Eurymedon River depicts a Persian bent over and about to be penetrated by a Greek. The inscription reads, “I am Eurymedon; I am bent over” (reproduced in Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, fig. 3). For the postbiblical tradition, Boyarin cites a passage from the *Mekhila* of Rabbi Ishmael (Amaleq 1) that tells of a foreign conqueror punishing a captive king of Israel by subjecting him to anal rape by the conqueror’s men (“Are There Any Jews,” 352). In the light of these examples, one can only speculate about what to read between the lines of 2 Sam 10:4–5.



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MONASTIC JEWISH WOMEN IN GRECO-ROMAN EGYPT: PHILO JUDAEUS ON THE THERAPEUTRIDES

ROSS S. KRAEMER

However the concept of communities is defined,¹ there are almost no examples of communities of Jewish women in late antiquity. Religious organizations of pagan women, such as the Bacchic *thiasoi*, or the cults of Artemis, Cybele, Demeter, and others, are relatively easy to document.² Similarly, there are examples of Christian

This article revises and expands a brief appendix to my dissertation, "Ecstasies and Ascetics: Studies in the Functions of Religious Activities for Women in the Greco-Roman World" (Princeton University, 1976). I would like to thank the Department of Religion at Amherst College, especially Susan Niditch and Robert Doran, for inviting me to spend the spring semester of 1987 as a visiting faculty member there, which gave me the time to write the first draft of this article. I would also like to thank Amy-Jill Levine for her extensive critique, much of which was extremely helpful in revising the manuscript to its present form, and the anonymous reader from *Signs*, whose comments helped me to clarify several points.

¹ My definition of community for this article was minimalist. I thought about instances of women who lived together or gathered together on some regular basis and whose ties to each other were not primarily those of biological kinship. I would have liked to include the element of self-definition or self-understanding of being a community distinct in some senses from the larger world, but in the two cases I discuss in this paper, it is impossible to ascertain the women's self-understanding.

² Texts pertaining to the cultic activities of women may be found in R. Kraemer, *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics: A Sourcebook on Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

women's communities from the second century on, if not even earlier.³ The inability to identify communities for Jewish women may be due to the relative paucity of research on Jewish women or on women's Judaism in the Greco-Roman period.⁴ Yet even in the available evidence there is very little indication of self-conscious communities of Jewish women, with only one major possible exception.

In a brief treatise entitled *On the Contemplative Life*, the first-century C.E. Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria describes in detail a Jewish monastic community living on the shores of Lake Mareotis outside Alexandria.⁵ According to Philo, the Therapeutic

³ Examples of such communities range from early references to orders of virgins and widows, to monasteries established by Pachomius in fourth-century Egypt, to monastic households such as that of Marcella in Rome in the fourth century, to monasteries founded by upper-class Roman women in Bethlehem and Jerusalem in the late fourth and early fifth centuries C.E. For some of the texts, see Kraemer, *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics*: on the Pachomian monasteries (33); on Marcella (73); and on Jerome's account of the life of Paula in his epistle to her daughter, Eustochium (71). The secondary literature on communities of early Christian women is considerable, e.g., Elizabeth Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom and Friends: Essays and Translations*, Studies in Women and Religion (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1981), and *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1986); Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," in her *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), 150–83, and "Mothers of the Church: Ascetic Women in the Late Patristic Age," in *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 71–89; Joanne McNamara, *The New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries* (New York: Haworth, 1983).

⁴ Some of the reasons for this neglect are discussed in R. Kraemer, "Women in the Religions of the Greco-Roman World," *Religious Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (1983): 127–39. I have begun to try to remedy this (R. Kraemer, "Non-literary Evidence for Jewish Women in Rome and Egypt," *Helios* [Rescuing Creusa: Women in Antiquity] 13, no. 2 [1986]: 85–101, and "Hellenistic Jewish Women: The Epigraphical Evidence," in *Seminar Papers of the Society of Biblical Literature*, no. 26, ed. Kent L. Richards [Decatur, Ill.: Scholars Press, 1986], 183–200), inspired by the groundbreaking work of Bernadette J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, Brown Judaic Studies, no. 36 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), and "Jewish Women's History in the Roman Period: A Task for Christian Theology," in G. W. E. Nicklesburg and G. W. MacRae, eds., "Christians among Jews and Gentiles: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday" *Harvard Theological Review* 79, nos. 1–3 (1986): 22–30. Relatively little other work has been done on this subject; see also, though, Leonie Archer, "The Role of Jewish Women in the Religion, Ritual and Cult of Graeco-Roman Palestine," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 273–87, which is a relatively uncritical survey of Josephus and some rabbinic sources; and Günter Mayer, *Die jüdische Frau in der hellenistisch römischen Antike* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1987).

⁵ Philo Judaeus, *De vita contemplativa*. For text and translation, see Ralph Colson, *Philo*, 10 vols., 2 suppl. vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Har-

society consisted of both men (*Therapeutae*) and women (*Therapeutrides*), who were equally devoted to the contemplative philosophical life.⁶ He begins his description of the Therapeutic society by observing that while contemplative monastics could be found outside many cities in the ancient world, the greatest of their communities was the one located outside Alexandria near the shores of Lake Mareotis. The advantages of this locale included both its pleasant climate and the security afforded by the proximity of farmhouses and villages.⁷ There, the members of the society lived in simple houses, far enough apart to foster the solitude conducive to contemplation, but close enough together to allow protection against robbers. Each house had a small room set aside for contemplation, into which members took "laws and oracles delivered through the mouth of prophets and psalms and anything else which fosters and perfects knowledge and piety."⁸ Their daily ritual was simple: they prayed at dawn, studied the scriptures through allegorical interpretation until evening (using the writings of men of old [*palaiōn andrōn*] to guide them in this exercise), and prayed again at night. They also composed and wrote down hymns and psalms. After their evening prayers, some ate a modest meal and otherwise tended to the minimal needs of their bodies, while others put off eating for intervals of up to six days.⁹

vard University Press, 1941), 9:104–71, hereafter cited as *On the Contemplative Life*. The *editio maior* of Philo is Leopold Cohn and Paul Wendland, *Philonis Opera Quae Supersunt*, 7 vols. in 8 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1896–1930). F. C. Conybeare prepared an edition of *On the Contemplative Life* (Oxford, 1895). Those unfamiliar with Philo will want to begin with E. R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962). The writings of Philo constitute the largest single corpus of any Jewish author from Egypt in this period. All translations are from Colson except where adapted by me as noted. All references to Colson are to his discussion in vol. 9.

⁶ "The vocation of these philosophers is at once made clear from their title of Therapeutae (m.pl) and Therapeutrides (f.pl)" (*On the Contemplative Life*, 2). The title derives from the Greek verb *therapeuō*, which Philo himself translates as either to heal both body and soul or else to worship. While Philo then sometimes refers to the entire community as the Therapeutae, he is careful at numerous points to emphasize the equal participation of women and men (32, 68, 69, 72, 80, 83, 87, 88). As much as possible, I will try to reflect this precision of language by using the term Therapeutrides to refer to the women of the society, the term Therapeutae to refer to the men of the society, and the term Therapeutics or the phrase Therapeutic society to refer to both women and men.

⁷ *On the Contemplative Life*, 23.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 34–35. A detailed, provocative discussion of the diet of Christian male monastics in Roman Egypt and its relation to the suppression of desire may be found in Aline Rousselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1988), chap. 10.

Six days of the week the members of the society remained separated from each other, coming out of their cells only in the evening and never coming out of their houses. On the Sabbath, however, they came together for a communal assembly and a modest meal. At this gathering, the senior member of the group (apparently always a man) gave a "wise and well-reasoned discourse."¹⁰

It is in the context of describing this community gathering that Philo first describes the participation of women in any detail. "This common sanctuary in which they meet every seventh day, is a double enclosure, one portion set aside for men, the other set aside for women. For women customarily form part of the audience with the same zeal and the same sense of calling."¹¹ Between the two sections was a wall that did not extend all the way to the ceiling, thus, Philo says, serving two purposes: it preserved the modesty of the women, and it allowed them to hear the speaker.

In addition to the Sabbath, the society observed a major feast, which seems to have been Shavuot, the Jewish festival of Weeks, called Pentecost in Greek. On this occasion, the members first came together for prayers, then reclined according to an order of seniority determined not by their chronological age but by their entry into the community.¹²

Describing this feast, Philo again emphasizes the presence of both Therapeutrides and Therapeutae:

The feast is shared by women also, most of them aged virgins [*geraiiai parthenoi*], who have kept their chastity not under compulsion, like some of the Greek priestesses, but of their own free will in their ardent yearning for wisdom. Eager to have her [wisdom] for their life mate, they have spurned the pleasures of the body and desire no mortal offspring, but only those immortal children which only the soul that is dear to God can bring to the birth unaided because the Father has sown in her spiritual rays enabling her to behold the verities of wisdom. . . . The order of reclining is so apportioned that the men sit by themselves on the right and the women by themselves on the left.¹³

The serving at the banquet was done not by slaves, since the society abhorred the whole idea of slavery, but by young men of the association chosen for their special virtue: "They give their services

¹⁰ *On the Contemplative Life*, 30–33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19, adapted.

¹² *Ibid.*, 67.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 68–69.

gladly and proudly like sons to their real fathers and mothers, judging them to be the parents of them all in common, in a closer affinity than that of blood, since to the right minded there is no closer tie than noble living.”¹⁴

At the feast itself, only bread and pure water were served, with hyssop available for those with “delicate palates.” Philo emphasizes that the Therapeutic society abstained from animal flesh and from wine. Prior to the festival meal, the society listened to the president deliver a lengthy yet modest discussion of questions arising from the Scriptures, according to the accepted allegorical methods. At its conclusion, the society applauded, after which the first round of singing began. The president rose and sang a hymn to God, either one of his own composition, or an old one of his choosing. After him, each of the members also sang: “After him, all the others take their turn as they are arranged and in the proper order while all the rest listen in complete silence except when they have to chant the closing lines or refrains, for then they all lift up their voices, all the men and all the women.”¹⁵ The text here is somewhat ambiguous: it may be read to mean that the women and the men each take a turn at chanting, or more narrowly that the women and the men chant the refrains together but that the women do not chant hymns singly.¹⁶

After the modest supper was served, the festival reached its climax of the sacred choral vigil: “They rise up all together and standing in the middle of the refectory form themselves first into two choirs, one of men and one of women, the leader and precentor of each being the most honoured among them, and also the most musical.”¹⁷ After much singing as separate choirs, although sometimes in unison and sometimes antiphonally or with harmony, the two choirs rearrange themselves, mixing the singers to become one chorus:

A copy of the choir set up of old beside the Red Sea in honour of the wonders there wrought. . . .

This wonderful sight [of the Red Sea parting and closing] and experience, an act transcending word and thought and

¹⁴ Ibid., 72.

¹⁵ Ibid., 80, adapted.

¹⁶ Given Philo’s repeated emphasis on the equal participation of women and the subsequent description of their singing, their chanting of hymns singly also seems reasonable. On the other hand, it may be that women were excluded from some participation in the communal life, such as the delivery of public lectures, which might suggest that they did not sing solos.

¹⁷ *On the Contemplative Life*, 83.

hope, so filled with ecstasy both men and women that forming a single choir they sang hymns of thanksgiving to God their savior, the men led by the prophet Moses and the women by the prophetess Miriam. . . .

It is on this model above all that the choir of the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides, note in response to note, the treble of the women blending with the bass of the men, create an harmonious concert, music in the truest sense.¹⁸

In this state of ecstasy, the society sang until dawn, when, after sunrise prayers, they returned to their own sanctuaries to resume their life of contemplation.

Since Philo represents the only evidence we possess for the existence of such a society,¹⁹ let alone its composition and practices, some scholars have wondered whether an actual community ever existed, or whether *On the Contemplative Life* merely presents Philo's idealization of a contemplative community.²⁰ Others have suggested that the detailed account of their daily activities, together with their festival observances, points to Philo's intimate knowledge of the community and that the absence of corroborative evidence from other sources suggests merely that the "settlement was small and ephemeral."²¹ The fact that Philo locates the community near Alexandria also suggests the basic veracity of his account, since at least some of his readers would have been able to verify the presence or absence of such a group if it was within easy traveling distance of the city. Elsewhere in his writings, Philo appears to allude to having lived with such a community at one time.²²

¹⁸ Ibid., 86–88.

¹⁹ Philo's description of the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides has been the subject of controversy since the fourth century, when Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, read it as a description of the first generation of Christians (*History of the Church* 2:17.3–24), a view that persisted among Christian scholars through the end of the last century. In 1880, Eusebius's interpretation was modified by two German scholars, who saw instead a third-century account of Christian monasticism written by a pseudepigraphic author who claimed the name of Philo to give the account credibility and authority. Subsequently, several scholars demonstrated persuasively both that Philo authored the text and that the community described is a Jewish one. See Colson (n. 5 above), 105–8; and E. Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black, literary ed. Pamela Vermes (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 2:591–97. For an exhaustive discussion, see also Jean Riaud, "Les Therapeutes d'Alexandrie dans la tradition critique jusqu'aux decouvertes de Qumran," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römische Welt*, pt. 2, vol. 20.2, ed. W. Haase (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1987), 1189–1295.

²⁰ Goodenough (n. 5 above), 32.

²¹ Colson, 106.

²² Philo, *On The Special Laws* 3:1–6, and *Allegorical Interpretation* 2:85.

On the reasonable assumption, then, that a Jewish monastic community of women and men existed on the shores of Lake Mareotis in the first century, Philo's account may be analyzed as evidence of the composition and concerns of that community. However, it is important to keep in mind that Philo cannot be considered a historian, even in the ancient sense of the term, and even those few works of his that explicitly describe contemporaneous events and persons have major apologetic concerns that dictate their form and content.²³ Philo's explicit purpose in *On the Contemplative Life* is to describe and praise the virtuous life lived by those philosophers who abandon worldly pursuits for solitude and the study of scripture. In this text, Philo not only lauds the Therapeutic way of life but also repeatedly contrasts it to the excesses of Greek life and takes many opportunities to demonstrate its superiority, even to the Greek philosophy which he admires.²⁴

We know little about Philo's intended audience for *On the Contemplative Life*. His repeated comparisons to Greek customs, his direct acknowledged quotation of Homer, and his references to Greek and Egyptian gods assume that his audience will both recognize the allusions and be persuaded that the behavior of the Therapeutic society is the more desirable. In addition, Philo's attention to the Therapeutrides and what he says about them may also tell us something about his audience. For example, when Philo observes that the women members of the community possess the same zeal for philosophy as the men, he may expect his audience to be surprised at the presence of women and at their interest in philosophy. In his descriptions of the Essenes, the only other Jewish monastic community with which he is acquainted, Philo makes it clear that women are explicitly excluded.²⁵ However, it is difficult

²³ Philo, *Embassy to Gaius*, and *Against Flaccus*.

²⁴ Philo contrasts the responsible behavior of the Therapeutics with the irresponsible behavior of Greek exemplars of philosophy, such as Anaxagoras and Democritus, who, smitten with the love of philosophy, abandoned their social responsibilities without making any provisions for their families and friends (*On the Contemplative Life*, 13–17). Elsewhere in the text, Philo repeatedly contrasts the excessive behavior of the Greeks with the modest behavior of the Therapeutics, especially regarding dress, rhetorical speech, and banquet practices (48–63). He also compares the Therapeutrides favorably to the Greek priestesses on the issue of sexual purity (68).

²⁵ Philo, *Hypothetica* 11:14–17. Philo describes the Essenes in three works: *That Every Good Man Is Free* 12 (75)–13 (91), *Hypothetica*, and briefly in *On the Contemplative Life*. Other ancient descriptions of the Essenes may be found in Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2:8.2–13, *Antiquities of the Jews* 13:5, 9, 18:1, 2; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 5.15/73. The literature on the Essenes and Qumran is enormous—

to determine what this says about Philo's audience—whether, for example, an Alexandrian Jewish audience would have been more surprised than a pagan audience to learn of women devoted to the philosophical life.²⁶ Similarly, it seems difficult to move from Philo's attention to the Therapeutrides to any conclusions about female readers of the text, except that if it is reasonable to assume that the Therapeutrides themselves might have read Philo's account, then surely women would have been among the ancient readers of the text.

Although it was hardly Philo's intention to describe the former lives of those who joined the society, he did in fact provide some of this information. To begin with, they may not have been exclusively Egyptian Jews: Philo observes that, while contemplative individuals can be found throughout the inhabited world, the best of them come to the Mareotic shores, which they consider their fatherland.²⁷ The members of the Therapeutic community are likely to have been well educated and of relatively high economic and social standing.²⁸ If Philo's general observations about contemplative individuals can be applied to those at Mareotis, they took up philosophical pursuits full time after they were adults, and they had some financial and economic resources. Philo twice speaks of people who left their families (including children) after having first disposed of their estates in a responsible fashion.

Thinking their mortal life already ended they abandon their property to their sons or daughters or to other kinsfolk, thus

in the vicinity of 7,000 items or more since the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1948. For some basic bibliography, see Schurer (n. 19 above), 2:555–61; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "The Judean Desert," in *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg, vol. 2 of *The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 119–56.

²⁶ On women members of philosophical communities, see Musonius Rufus, "That Women Too Should Study Philosophy," text and translation in Cora E. Lutz, "Musonius Rufus, 'The Roman Socrates,'" *Yale Classical Studies* 10 (1947): 38–43; and A. C. Geytenbeek, *Musonius Rufus and Greek Diatribe* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), 51–62. Epicurus admitted women to his philosophical community called the Garden, and at least one Cynic philosopher, Hipparchia, is known to have been a woman. See Wayne A. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *Journal of Religion* 13 (1974): 170–76; and Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken, 1974), 131–37. See also Beatrice Zedler's translation of a seventeenth-century work on ancient women philosophers: Gilles Menage, *History of Women Philosophers* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984).

²⁷ *On the Contemplative Life*, 22.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

voluntarily advancing the time of their inheritance, while those who have no kinsfolk give them to comrades and friends. . . .

How . . . admirable are those who with no less ardour for the study of wisdom preferred magnanimity to negligence and gave away their possessions instead of wasting them, in this way benefiting both others and themselves, others through supplying them with abundant resources, themselves through furthering the study of philosophy. . . . So, when they have divested themselves of their possessions and have no longer aught to ensnare them they flee without a backward glance and leave their brothers [siblings], children, wives, parents, the wide circle of their relatives, the groups of friends around them. . . .²⁹

It would seem that much of Philo's discussion of the educational and concomitant social and economic characteristics of the contemporaries applies to women. It seems clear that those who came to Mareotis were already favorably disposed to the allegorical interpretation of Jewish scriptures (which they, like Philo, read in Greek, perhaps not even knowing the Hebrew), and that they had received a classical Greek education similar to that which Philo himself must have had.³⁰ Given Philo's observation that the women pursued their studies and contemplation with a fervor equal to that of the men, they must have been similarly educated. While it is unlikely that very many women, Jewish or otherwise, would have been so highly educated, the evidence from papyri, inscriptions, and literature suggests that at least some women in Alexandria and in other communities with substantial Jewish populations in this period were well educated.³¹

²⁹ Ibid., 17, 19.

³⁰ Ibid., 68–69.

³¹ On the question of women's education, see Susan Guettel Cole, "Could Greek Women Read and Write?" *Women's Studies* 8 (1981): 129–55, reprinted in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, ed. H. Foley (London: Gordon & Breach, 1981), 219–45; Sarah B. Pomeroy, "Technikai Kai Mousikai: The Education of Women in the Fourth Century and in the Hellenistic Period," *American Journal of Ancient History* 2 (1977): 51–68. The evidence for some educated Jewish women in Egypt and elsewhere should caution us in our evaluation of rabbinic statements about the education of Jewish women. Some rabbis vehemently opposed any education for women, while others argued in favor. For the references, see George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Three Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927), 2:128–29. However, we should be cautious in taking rabbinic attitudes as evidence for social practice in rabbinic communities and very skeptical about the use of those attitudes as evidence for Jewish social practice in diaspora communities.

It is not implausible that the Therapeutrides had significant financial resources over which they had some control, prior to entering the community. The papyri document the active participation of women in the economic life of first-century Egypt, both for Jews and non-Jews.³² While the evidence for wealthy women is rare (as it is for wealthy men), there is enough evidence for the economic independence of women both from Egypt and elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world to make it plausible that some women could have fit Philo's description.³³ Philo himself refers to women who inherit property.³⁴

The usual determinants of social status, such as local and Roman citizenship, free birth, being slave or freed, are not clearly correlated to economic status. Slaves and freedpersons could control significant amounts of wealth. Further, these were not necessarily the criteria by which Jewish communities judged themselves, although citizenship was a matter of pride for many Jews. Status determinants such as citizenship are not always as useful or significant when discussing women, for they frequently tell us more about a woman's male relatives than about the woman herself.

While much of Philo's general description of contemplatives applies equally to men and women, one particular detail does not. When he lists those whom philosophers abandon to take up the contemplative life, husbands are conspicuous by their absence, while wives are specifically noted. The term "wife" here is the only gender-specific one in the list: all the others, at least in the grammatical constructions of Hellenistic Greek, could connote both males and females.³⁵ This could be explained as a mere reflection of the gen-

³² See Sarah B. Pomeroy, "Women in Roman Egypt: A Preliminary Study Based on Papyri," in Haase, ed. (n. 19 above), pt. 2, vol. 10.1, and *Women in Hellenistic Egypt: From Alexander to Cleopatra* (New York: Schocken, 1984); see also Kraemer, "Non-literary Evidence" (n. 4 above).

³³ For example, Lydia of Thyatira in Acts 16 (see G. Horsley, ed., *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* [North Ryde: The Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1982], 2:29–32); and Rufina of Smyrna and other women in Asia Minor (see Kraemer, "Hellenistic Jewish Women" [n. 4 above]).

³⁴ *On the Contemplative Life*, 13.

³⁵ That is, *adelphoi* (siblings); *tekna* (children); *goneis* (parents); etc. (*On the Contemplative Life*, 18). In this regard, the practices of Christian women monastics and ascetics may be an interesting contrast, since many of them clearly left husbands to take up the religious life, e.g., Maximilla in the Acts of Andrew. More historical women like the martyr Perpetua seem to have left husbands, although it is interesting to suggest, as did one of my students at Amherst College in the spring of 1987, that the real father of Perpetua's child is not a missing/abandoning/abandoned husband but her own father, following Mary Lefkowitz's implication that Perpetua may have been the victim of father/daughter incest ("The Motivations for St. Perpetua's Martyrdom," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44 [1976]: 416–21).

eral male vantage point from which Philo, like countless male authors from antiquity to the present, views the world. But it may also be a detail of social reality, given his meticulous attention to the participation of both women and men in the Mareotis society, his precise use of language in general, and the fact that there is a Greek term for spouse (*symbios*) that Philo could have used and does use in fact to describe the spouse whom the Therapeutrides did take—Wisdom.³⁶ Those who adopted the contemplative life did not leave husbands behind because the women who became contemplative monastics did not have husbands to leave—either because they never had them or because they waited until they no longer had husbands to take up such a life.

That the Therapeutrides were unmarried is further substantiated in Philo's brief yet enormously rich description of them, where he tells us four potentially significant things. Most of the Therapeutrides are virgins, whose chastity is by choice; they are advanced in age; instead of human mates, they have sought Wisdom, personified in the female form, as a spouse; and they have no children, preferring immortal, spiritual offspring to the ordinary kind.

Any analysis of the Therapeutrides requires us to assess how much of this is likely to be literally true. We must keep in mind that, for Philo, allegory was the key to the proper understanding of the Jewish scriptures.³⁷ Unlike some of his contemporaries, Philo held that both the literal and the allegorical meaning of the biblical text were true and significant, although the allegorical was by far the more important. Among other things, for Philo this meant that the Law should be observed literally while understanding its higher, philosophical meanings.³⁸ Thus, social facts (age, virginity, marital status, childbearing) probably took on additional levels of meaning for Philo, especially when he discussed philosophers.

In particular, Philo's account of the Therapeutrides' virginity must be viewed against the background of his other usage of the terms "virgin" and "virginity" and against his use of the categories male and female, all of which feature significantly in his writings. For Philo, female figures and the feminine usually symbolized the lower, sensate part of the soul and so served as symbolic represen-

³⁶ His use of the term *symbios* here may in fact reflect its gender-neutral form—since Wisdom is female, and it would be difficult for Philo to call Wisdom the male husband of the Therapeutrides.

³⁷ See Philo, *On Allegorical Interpretation*; Goodenough (n. 5 above), 139 ff.

³⁸ For Philo's own statement about the veracity of both literal and allegorical interpretation, see *On the Migration of Abraham*, 89.

tation of the sensible world, all of which carried with it negative connotations. Male figures and the masculine usually symbolized *nous* and *logos* (mind and reason), the higher state of the soul, and the imperceptible world.³⁹

While Philo is rarely systematic in his description of the progress of the soul, becoming virgin was crucial in order for the soul, originally female, to become capable of attaining the goal of union with the divine. Becoming male was also a spiritual achievement, a transition that Philo describes as follows: "Progress is indeed nothing else than the giving up of the female gender by changing into the male, since the female gender is material, passive, corporeal and sense perceptible, while the male is active, rational, incorporeal, and more akin to mind and thought."⁴⁰ For Philo, the Therapeutrides were female in form only. In other respects, like good philosophers who aspire to mystical union with the divinity, they had purged their souls of their female elements and become male and/or virgin. It would have been consistent with Philo's understanding of the relation between the real and the ideal if the Therapeutrides were virgin in social fact as well as in spiritual accomplishment. Philo's comment about their rejection of biological children at least suggests that they might have been so. Similarly, his omission of husbands in the list of those whom philosophers leave behind, which I discussed earlier, suggests that the Therapeutrides were unmarried if not actually physically virgins.

But in addition, the Therapeutrides may also have been post-menopausal. Philo clearly indicates that most of these women were advanced in age. In a discussion of Abraham and Sarah, he implies that the definition of an old woman is one who has ceased to menstruate,⁴¹ and elsewhere he associates the cessation of menstruation with the process of becoming a virgin. "When God begins to consort with the soul, He makes what before was a woman into a virgin again, for He takes away the degenerate and emasculate passions which unmanned it and plants instead the native growth of unpolluted virtues. Thus God will not talk with Sarah till she has ceased

³⁹ See Richard Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 40–44. Baer recognizes that for Philo the Therapeutrides were women in name only but does not develop this idea at any length (100). A doctoral dissertation by Dorothy Sly at McMaster University on "Philo's Perception of Women" has been reported in progress (*Religious Studies Review* 13, no. 3 [1987]: 285). See also Judith Romney Wegner, "The Image of Woman in Philo," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 21 (1982): 551–63.

⁴⁰ Philo, *Questions and Answers on Exodus*, 1:8.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4:15.

from all that is after the manner of women and is ranked once more as a pure virgin."⁴²

For Philo, not only was Sarah postmenopausal and beyond the possibility of bearing a child, as Gen. 18:11 states explicitly, but her soul had given up its female aspects and was only then capable of union with the divine. The sexual metaphor is hardly lost on Philo: the result of that union is the birth of Isaac, whom Philo considered the son of God.⁴³ Since Philo does say that most of the women were elder virgins, it may be that he thought some younger women were capable of the philosophical life, but it is probably the case that for Philo, postmenopausal women were particularly appropriate candidates.

More evidence that Philo considered the Therapeutrides female in form only may come from his claim that they rejected human spouses, desiring instead to have the female Wisdom/Sophia as their lifemate.⁴⁴ Philo offers this observation with not the slightest explanation of why female philosophers would choose a female spouse. Given his documented revulsion toward male homosexuality, I doubt that Philo intends here any subtle allusion to female homoeroticism.⁴⁵ Instead, I see this as one more indication that Philo conceptualizes the Therapeutrides as no longer female, in which case an explicitly female spouse requires no explanation at all.

Being childless and unmarried would also have made the Therapeutrides less female in Philo's eyes. Unattached to husbands and children, beyond the confines of menstruation and potential fertility, they became suitable candidates for mystical union with the divine: they have left behind the feminine and attained the masculinity/virginity necessary for the soul to unite with the divine in the mystical bridal chamber.

⁴² Philo, *On the Cherubim*, 50.

⁴³ For references and a fascinating discussion, see Goodenough, 142–45.

⁴⁴ On Sophia, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 130–40; Rose H. Arthur, *The Wisdom Goddess: Feminine Motifs in Eight Nag Hammadi Documents* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984); Deirde J. Good, *Reconstructing the Tradition of Sophia*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, no. 32 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987); Karen King, ed., *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); and S. Cady, M. Ronan, and H. Taussig, *Sophia: The Future of Feminist Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

⁴⁵ For Philo's opinion of male homosexuality, see *On the Contemplative Life*, 61, *On the Special Laws*, 3:37 ff., and *On Abraham*, 135 ff. On the concept of spiritual marriage, see, e.g., Richard A. Horsley, "Spiritual Marriage with Sophia," *Vigiliae Christianae* 33 (1979): 30–54, esp. 32–43.

Not only does Philo tell us that the Therapeutrides have no mortal children, but seizing typically on the allegorical possibilities, he argues that they have preferred instead the spiritual children who are the result of intercourse between the purified virgin soul, which has given up the ways of women, and Wisdom. Significantly, though, this is not an observation he makes about the (male) Therapeutae. The men of the society are nowhere said to have spiritual children, and the list of those whom philosophers abandon suggests that they did have real, mortal children.⁴⁶ However, both the Therapeutrides and the Therapeutae, at least the elder among them, were effectively childless by the time they entered the community—the women because they have never had children; the men because, even if they had children, as Therapeutics they are now as if dead to their families. According to Philo, the younger men of the society who serve at the Pentecostal banquet served the elders as though they were their fathers and mothers, suggesting an adoptive relationship between them.

It might be objected that the aspects of the Therapeutrides Philo has chosen to mention are so intimately connected for him with their pursuit of the philosophical life as to be suspect as historical evidence. Philo's clear acceptance of the Therapeutrides belies the misogyny manifest elsewhere in his writings and might also be reason to doubt the accuracy of his report of the Therapeutrides. However, Philo's attitudes toward women in his other works are consistent with his praise of the Therapeutrides given his representation of them as no longer female.

In his discussion of the Mosaic laws, Philo describes the appropriate spheres of women's activity, locating them in household and domestic chores: "Women are best suited to the indoor life which never strays from the house, within which the middle door is taken by the virgins as their boundary, and the outer door by [grown] women."⁴⁷ By contrast, the appropriate locations for men's activities are the public arenas such as the marketplaces, the council halls, and the law courts. But as Philo goes on to describe the inappropriate spheres of women's activity, it becomes apparent that there was a substantial discrepancy between what Philo thought was appropriate and what women really did, for he devotes several pages

⁴⁶ One could argue that this same list suggests that women philosophers also abandon children. Since, however, they do not abandon husbands, and since Philo is explicit about their childlessness, I doubt that we can construe this to mean that women philosophers had no husbands but did have children.

⁴⁷ *On the Special Laws*, 3:169.

to decrying the behavior of women in public, which would not have been necessary had they really confined themselves to the private life Philo considers ideal.⁴⁸ Elsewhere, while recounting the outrage of the Jews against the unwarranted and degrading arms search conducted by Castus, Philo maintains that Jewish women were segregated in accordance with his ideals,⁴⁹ but the testimony of the papyri to women's participation in public life,⁵⁰ and Philo's own contradictory evidence casts doubt on the accuracy of this report.

Overall, Philo's depictions of Jewish women in Alexandrian life and his personal attitudes toward women do not conflict with his portrayal of the Therapeutrides. For example, to the extent that Philo thought women ought to be removed from public spheres of activity and confined to private areas, the Therapeutrides would have conformed to his values. After all, they spent most of their time in seclusion not only from their male counterparts but from each other as well. When they did come together for communal worship, the women and the men maintained some physical separation, except for the final chorus of Pentecost/Shavuoth. There is nothing in Philo to suggest that he took offense at the Therapeutrides' education or objected to their devotion to philosophy.

Indeed, Philo's description of the Therapeutrides as older virgins suggests that he accepted and approved of their monastic life. Much of Philo's criticism of women is directed to their behavior as wives, in relation to their husbands. Since the Therapeutrides had no husbands, having preferred Wisdom as a mate, they may have been outside the sphere of Philo's criticisms of other women. More significant, for Philo, the Therapeutrides were no longer women and therefore no longer subject to his criticisms of women.

This cluster of characteristics which Philo attributes to the Therapeutrides now allows us to gain some insights into the women themselves. In particular, their childlessness emerges as a central element in their choice of the contemplative life. In a society that valued women primarily for their roles as wives and mothers, women who did not marry and did not bear children would have found themselves somewhat suspect.⁵¹ The values of the Therapeutics,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 168–77.

⁴⁹ *Against Flaccus*, 89.

⁵⁰ See n. 32 above.

⁵¹ This argument, which is developed at length in my dissertation ("Ecstasies and Ascetics: Studies in the Functions of Religious Activities for Women in the Greco-Roman World" [Princeton University, 1976]) and several subsequent articles, depends heavily on the work of Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven: New Earth* (New York: Schocken, 1969); and I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

who prized knowledge, philosophy, chastity, the solitary life, and the spiritual quest of the individual soul above all other human endeavors, would have legitimated, if unintentionally, women who did not fulfill the usual social expectations of becoming wives and mothers.

However, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza contends that in the early Roman period childlessness did not carry a social stigma sufficient to affect women's religious choices.⁵² There is ample evidence that among the Roman aristocracy the birth rate had declined enough by the end of the first century B.C.E. to warrant legislation designed to penalize male celibacy and to encourage aristocratic women to bear children, namely, the *lex Julia* and the *lex Papia Poppaea*.⁵³ For a limited number of upper-class Roman women, in control of adequate financial resources, childbearing may not have been a crucial measure of social worth and, therefore, not a critical factor in their religious choices. But this legislation was directed specifically at the Roman aristocracy, and so it is unlikely that more than a handful of women in the Greco-Roman world would have been exempt from the social pressures of marriage and childbearing. Fur-

⁵² Schüssler Fiorenza (n. 44 above), 183, cites moralists who chide women for not wanting children and for getting rid of their husbands with ease, regrettably without references. Some of the pertinent material may be found in Keith Hopkins, "Contraception in the Roman Empire," *Comparative Studies in History and Society* 8 (1965): 124–51; and in John T. Noonan, Jr., *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (1965; reprint, New York: Mentor, 1967), 23–46. Additional discussion of the issues of contraception, abortion, and so forth may be found in Eve Cantarella, *Pandora's Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, trans. Maureen B. Fant (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 135–70.

⁵³ The Augustan legislation of the *lex Julia* (18 B.C.E.) and the *lex Papia Poppaea* (9 C.E.) encouraged legal marriage and the production of legitimate heirs among Roman citizens, primarily in Rome, by prohibiting unmarried childless men and women from receiving certain inheritances and by providing that freeborn women who had three legitimate children (four for freedwomen) would no longer be under the authority of a male guardian—the so-called *ius (trium) liberorum*. These regulations affected only Roman citizens, who must have married legally permissible spouses and produced legitimate heirs. Aline Rousselle suggests that the decline in the aristocratic Roman birth rate was a function of many factors, including a widespread belief among upper-class Roman men that ejaculation was detrimental to male well-being, and errors as to the fertile period in the menstrual cycle (Rousselle [n. 9 above], 45). Sarah Pomeroy also concurs that the desire not to have children was an upper-class phenomenon (*Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* [n. 26 above], 166). On the Augustan legislation and the intricacies of Roman marriage, in addition to Rousselle, see Jane Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 20–22, 31–116; Leo Ferrero Raditsa, "Augustus' Legislation concerning Marriage, Procreation, Love Affairs and Adultery," in Haase, ed. (n. 19 above), pt. 2, 13: 278–339; and Horsley, ed. (n. 33 above).

ther, these laws would themselves have put pressure on certain women to produce legitimate heirs.

Certainly later Christian texts address these issues. In the second-century C.E. *Acts of Thecla*, the heroine—described as a convert and disciple of Paul—is accused by her own mother of the crime of refusing to marry.⁵⁴ The benefits that ascetics receive by refusing intercourse and its assumed corollary, children, are spelled out in no uncertain terms in the *Acts of Thomas*: “Know this, that if you abandon this filthy intercourse, you will not be girt about with cares for life and for children, the end of which is destruction. . . . But if you obey and keep your souls pure unto God, you shall have living children, whom these hurts do not touch and shall be without care, leading an undisturbed life without grief or anxiety, waiting to receive that incorruptible and true marriage.”⁵⁵ The author of the Gospel according to Luke places in the mouth of Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, a lengthy speech in which she calls her prior childlessness a reproach among society that has now been taken away (Luke 1:25).

The extent to which such examples reflect women’s own understanding, and to which they reflect *only* the projection onto women of male desires for children (or for women to have children) is unclear. In all probability, the Gospel according to Luke was written by a man, although the authorship of the *Acts of Thecla* is a more complex problem.⁵⁶ Given the extent to which early Christianity spread rapidly among women, it seems likely that many Christian women would have found such sentiments realistic when placed on the lips of women. In the social environment of early Christianity and early Judaism, the attitudes toward children that such texts assume were almost certainly a fair representation of the way many people thought, both women and men.

⁵⁴ *Acts of Thecla* 20; see Kraemer, *Maenads* (n. 2 above). On childlessness as a factor in Christian women’s asceticism, see R. Kraemer, “The Conversion of Women to Ascetic Forms of Christianity,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1980): 298–307.

⁵⁵ *Acts of Thomas* 12; for an English translation, see E. Hennecke and W. Scheemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963, 1965) 2: 425–531.

⁵⁶ For the hypothesis that the *Acts of Thecla* and other similar texts were written by women, see Stevan Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980). For the more moderate view that this is women’s oral literature, see Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985). Schüssler Fiorenza also considers the possible female authorship of the Gospel of John (323–33).

That Philo's own society, however narrowly we construe that, regarded childless women with some suspicion may be deduced from his discussion of the Mosaic laws regarding women suspected of adultery and women who do not bear children. In the case of adultery, Philo expands on the text of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of Hebrew Scriptures used by Greek-speaking Jews in the first century), which, like the Hebrew, views the conception of children by a woman accused of adultery as evidence that she is innocent (since guilty women, having drunk the test waters, will not conceive but, rather, become violently ill): "For if she has been falsely accused, she may hope to conceive and bear children and *pay no heed to her fears and apprehensions of sterility or childlessness.*"⁵⁷ My italics highlight Philo's elaboration on the biblical verse. While it is unlikely that such tests were administered among Alexandrian Jews in Philo's times, it is not unlikely that childlessness was viewed within this context—if not as evidence of adultery, then at least as evidence of divine displeasure.

Philo himself addresses the plight of the married man who has no children. The Mosaic law, he notes, allows him to divorce his wife and marry another (which practice assumes, of course, that it is the woman who is unable to bear children and not the man). Philo expresses sympathy and understanding for the man who chooses to remain married to his wife, notwithstanding her failure to have children. Unlike the case of the woman suspected of adultery, whose direct implications for Alexandrian Jewish life are not clear, the second makes obvious the importance of childbearing. Although having children was important for Jewish men (at least in rabbinic literature, the injunction in Gen. 1:22 to be fruitful and multiply was thought to be incumbent on men but not necessarily on women), the social consequences of not bearing children—namely, divorce and the social marginality that such divorce carried with it—seem to have fallen disproportionately on women.⁵⁸

Clearly, becoming a Therapeutic was an alternative available only to a very few Jewish women in the first century C.E.—those who already had the requisite education, which not only included literacy but also favored the allegorical school of interpretation associated especially with Alexandria. It is unlikely that most Jewish childless women became Therapeutrides; most would have lacked the sophisticated education necessary (as would have most men).

⁵⁷ *On the Special Laws*, 3:62; Num. 5:28, on which this is based, says only that, if the woman is innocent, she will conceive children.

⁵⁸ For *On the Special Laws*, see 3:35. For the Rabbinic discussion, see Mishna *Yebamot* 6.6.

But of those women who had the requisite training, childless women would have been particularly drawn to a community that utilized so heavily the metaphors of Philo.

All this suggests that the Therapeutrides were able to participate in the contemplative life on a more or less equal basis with men only when they renounced the distinctive (though not definitional) aspects of being women—sexuality and childbearing. It is difficult to assess how much they might have internalized the perception of themselves as male, or at least as no longer female. Several early Christian texts do suggest that some ancient ascetic and monastic women might have held a similar self-understanding.⁵⁹

In the *Acts of Thecla*, the fictional heroine disguises herself as a man in order to follow Paul in his missionary travels.⁶⁰ Although, as with all extant ancient literature, the *Acts of Thecla* has survived until modern times through male agency, with all the problems attendant therein, those who have looked closely at *Thecla* and other similar stories now consider it likely that these Acts originated as women's stories. At least one scholar has suggested that the Acts were actually written by women.⁶¹

As another example, the historical Perpetua, martyred in the early third century C.E., recorded a prison vision in which she assumed the body of a man in order to fight an enormous male Egyptian gladiator in the arena, although when she received the branch of victory at the conclusion of the contest, her true female identity was recognized.⁶² Most scholars now feel that the account of Perpetua's imprisonment and preparation for martyrdom comes from her own narrative, although in its present form, the text has been given a narrative framework and includes the account of the death of several others who died with Perpetua.⁶³

⁵⁹ The *Gospel of Thomas* 114 contains the following vignette: "Simon Peter said to them, 'Let Mary [of Magdala] leave us, for women are not worthy of Life.' Jesus said, 'I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven'" (translated by Thomas O. Lambdin, in James Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977], 130). Whether some women shared this view of salvation cannot be determined from this text.

⁶⁰ *Acts of Thecla* 40.

⁶¹ See n. 56 above.

⁶² *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas* 10; see Kraemer, *Maenads* (n. 2 above).

⁶³ See, e.g., Lefkowitz, "The Motivations for St. Perpetua's Martyrdom" (n. 35 above), and *Women in Greek Myth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 95–111. See also Rosemary Rader's introduction to her translation of Perpetua's narrative in P. Wilson-Kastner et al., *A Lost Tradition: Women Writers of the Early Church* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1981).

Collections of sayings attributed to Egyptian Christian monastics living in the fourth and fifth centuries C.E. include a small number attributed to women ascetics. Two ascribed to Amma (Mother) Sarah are particularly instructive: "According to nature, I am a woman, but not according to my thoughts . . . It is I who am a man, you [the monks] who are women."⁶⁴

While it is problematic to argue from evidence about Christian women in the second to fifth centuries in order to draw conclusions about first-century Jewish women, it may be significant that the *Gospel of Thomas*⁶⁵ and the *Sayings of the Desert Mothers* are also Egyptian. Further, there are considerable points of contact between Philo and later Alexandrian Christianity, and it is not inconceivable that the perspective reflected in these materials, especially the sayings of Sarah, would have been understood or even shared by the Therapeutrides themselves. Certainly it was the case that for some Christian men, particularly ascetics, Christian women were acceptable companions and colleagues only when they renounced the distinctive features of femaleness in antiquity, namely, sexuality and childbearing.⁶⁶

Regrettably, there are no texts from the Therapeutrides themselves to shed light on this or on any of the other issues that interest us here. Interestingly, though, there may be some connections between the Therapeutics and two Greek Jewish texts whose authorship is either anonymous or falsely attributed (pseudepigraphic). One of these, *The Conversion and Marriage of Aseneth* (a work more commonly known as *Joseph and Aseneth*), explains how it is that Joseph married the daughter of an Egyptian priest (Gen. 44:45, 44:50, 46:20) by recounting in great detail the circumstances of her conversion to the God of Joseph.⁶⁷ While ostensibly a tale of ancient

⁶⁴ Kraemer, *Maenads* (n. 2 above), 66.

⁶⁵ See Robinson, ed. (n. 59 above).

⁶⁶ This point seems to be overlooked by Rosemary Rader, who views the acceptance of women by male monastics only when women become like men much more benignly in *Breaking Boundaries: Male/Female Friendship in Early Christian Communities* (New York and Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1983); see my review of Rader's book in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23 (1986): 127–28.

⁶⁷ The text has usually been called *Joseph and Aseneth* following the pattern of Hellenistic romances named for the hero and heroine. However, the manuscript evidence for the original title of the work is inconclusive, and I have retitled it *The Conversion and Marriage of Aseneth* in my translation in *Maenads* (n. 2 above) to reflect the central emphasis on Aseneth herself. Text and French translation, with extensive notes and commentary, may be found in M. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aseneth: Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968). An English translation of Philonenko's text by D. Cook may be found in H. F. D. Sparks, ed., *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 465–504. Christoph Burchard has argued strongly for a different text than Philonenko's: see

Egypt, *Aseneth* is quite clearly a Greco-Roman Jewish romance whose true social setting is Hellenistic Egypt.⁶⁸ Long considered a text of minor significance for our knowledge of Greco-Roman Jews and Judaism, *Aseneth* recently has begun to receive more detailed attention, which has emphasized its significance as a text in which a woman occupies center stage and which, at least in one reconstruction of the text, is conspicuously lacking in any misogynist language or implications.⁶⁹ Quite the opposite, *Aseneth* is one of the few Jewish texts of this period to use some compelling feminine imagery for the divine.⁷⁰ Independently of the possible implications for Jewish women, some scholars have pointed to such similarities as the rejection of banquets and rich food and the emphasis on mystical union and divine marriage as evidence for a connection between *Aseneth* and the Therapeutics.⁷¹

The other such text is the *Testament of Job*, a work that elaborates on the story of the Hebrew Bible.⁷² Of particular interest is the final portion, which describes the spiritual inheritance that Job bequeaths to his three daughters. All three are described as possessed of impressive mystical powers and are the writers of hymns, once collected but now lost.⁷³ The question of hymns has in the past led some scholars to speculate that the *Testament of Job* was

his introduction and translation in J. Charlesworth, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1986), 2:77–247.

⁶⁸ In addition to the introductions in the preceding note, see also G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 258–63.

⁶⁹ Philonenko's text turns out to eliminate virtually all of the passages that might be construed as explicitly misogynist, a feature that needs further consideration.

⁷⁰ See the depiction of Metanoia, called the Daughter of God, in *Aseneth* 15:7–8. The figure of Wisdom as an aspect of the divine clearly occurs in many Jewish texts of the Greco-Roman period, but those texts are often pervasively misogynist, such as the *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira*. On this, see Warren C. Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View of Women* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982).

⁷¹ On the Therapeutic authorship of Joseph and *Aseneth*, see Philonenko (n. 67 above), 104–5, who concedes the seductiveness of the theory but concludes that the evidence is inconclusive at best. He realizes the concord between the absence of misogyny in his reconstruction of the text, and the participation of women at Mareotis, but he does not suggest that a woman author might be an even more interesting possibility.

⁷² Greek text and English translation appear in Robert A. Kraft, with Harold Attridge, Russell Spittler, and Janet Timbie, *The Testament of Job: Greek Text and English Translation*, SBL Texts and Translations 5, Pseudepigrapha 4 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1974); English translations also in Sparks, ed. (n. 67 above), 617–48; and in Charlesworth, ed. (n. 67 above), 1:829–68.

⁷³ *Testament of Job* 46–50; also in Kraemer, *Maenads* (n. 2 above).

authored by a Therapeutic, but only recently a few scholars have taken seriously the possibility that the story of Job's hymning, mystical daughters reflects the social reality of some Jews in late antiquity.⁷⁴

The present state of our knowledge about these texts cannot support more than disciplined speculation about their authorship. But if it is reasonable to identify either or both works with the Therapeutics, it is equally reasonable to consider whether they were written by women members of the society or whether, even if written by men, they shed some light on the perspectives of the Therapeutics themselves on the significance of gender in the community.

If women were drawn to the Therapeutics by the opportunity to live the contemplative life within a community that both symbolically and actually provided refuge from a world critical of childlessness, equally inviting may have been the metaphoric representation of the mystical union of the soul with the divine, not only as a spiritual marriage but also as a reunion of the child with the mother. Although *On the Contemplative Life* does not address this issue directly, elsewhere in Philo's works divine union with the soul is explicitly described as rebirth through union with the mother.⁷⁵ Given Philo's extremely high opinion of the Therapeutics, his testimony that they read Jewish Scripture allegorically, and the

⁷⁴ Pieter W. van der Horst, "The Role of Women in the Testament of Job," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 40, no. 4 (1986): 273–89.

⁷⁵ Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, 4:145 (on Gen. 24:67). The text is extant only in Armenian. The following paraphrase is taken from Goodenough (n. 5 above), 143–44: "Rebecca is, like Sarah, Virtue or Sophia interchangeably. . . . She is so exalted a figure that her bracelets are sufficient to represent the entire cosmos which the immaterial Stream of God similarly wears. When she gives the servant to drink at the well it is the Logos itself which he receives. . . . Rebecca-Sophia approaches Isaac who has gone out in the evening to meditate in the field. . . . Rebecca comes down to him and gets down from her camel as Sophia comes down to the mystic. She is veiled as are the inner secrets of the Mystery. At last they are united in the wedding chamber, which is itself the house of Sarah, also the type of Sophia, and here Isaac is united with the eternal Virgin, 'from whose love,' Philo prays, 'may I never cease.' Now Isaac is consoled for the loss of his mother, for in Rebecca he has found Sophia again, not as an old woman, but as one who is eternally young in corporeal beauty. . . . Again the soul is reborn by union with its own mother. . . ." Goodenough obviously found his own reading of Philo sufficiently provocative to require immediate defense, for in his very next sentence he writes: "This is not madness. It is the cry of the soul to be at one with the greater thing from which it has come, to unite itself with the universal spirit which for all its cosmic and hypercosmic motherhood is eternally virgin. For sexual as are the experience and language, the soul has become united with something whose own essential superiority can be expressed only by assertions of its eternal virginity."

possibility that he was at one time a member of the community, it seems feasible that the Therapeutics might have shared this understanding. Further, if for women the bearing and raising of children offers one possibility for regaining one's lost mother through the recreating of the mother-child relationship, childless women might have found the opportunity to regain the lost mother through a spiritual experience extraordinarily compelling.

While the Therapeutrides may have had some economic motivation for joining the community, the available evidence suggests that the kinds of economic factors that have been identified as motives for later Christian asceticism do not apply here.⁷⁶ Monastic asceticism as the way to deal with too many daughters or insufficient dowries may have worked well in later Christian communities, but too little is known about the demographics of educated Jews in first-century Alexandria and other diaspora communities to determine whether such economic considerations were an issue. If the Therapeutrides did not join the community until they were relatively old, their entry into the contemplative life is not likely to have been motivated, even in part, by pressures to confine and control grown but unmarried women, since such pressures would presumably have led to their adopting the ascetic life at a much younger age, as we know was the case for some Roman Christian ascetics several hundred years later.⁷⁷

Although asceticism was compelling for the earliest Christians and the Essene community at Qumran, at least in part out of the conviction that the world was about to end and that therefore sexuality and childbearing could be of no further use except to hinder preparation for the end,⁷⁸ there is nothing in Philo to suggest that the Therapeutics, whether male or female, shared this eschatological outlook. In Philo's own account of the Essenes, in contrast to some of the texts that have been found at Qumran, eschatology does not figure at all as the explanation for their asceticism.⁷⁹ Yet the very absence of any eschatological component to asceticism and monasticism at Mareotis may be significant. At Qumran, the end of the world was envisioned as an apocalyptic conflagration through a violent war between the sons of light and the sons of darkness.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ For example, Anne Yarbrough, "The Christianization of Rome: The Example of Roman Women," *Church History* 45 (1976): 149–65.

⁷⁷ See n. 3 above.

⁷⁸ As is clearly the message in Paul (1 Cor. 7, esp. 32–35).

⁷⁹ See n. 25 above.

⁸⁰ For example, see the Dead Sea scroll *The War between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness*.

There do not appear to have been meaningful numbers of women at Qumran, perhaps because they were actively excluded by the male community.⁸¹ But it may be more significant that the entire cosmology, theology, and symbolic universe of Qumran was so pervasively male that no women would have found it acceptable, let alone compelling. Asceticism as a by-product of cataclysmic war may have been incomprehensible to women. Asceticism derived from less militaristic eschatology, such as that of earliest Christian-

⁸¹ Whether there were women among the Essenes and among the monastics at Qumran (whom most scholars take to have been Essenes of some sort or other, although the issue has never been absolutely settled) is complicated. According to Philo, the Essenes (whom he presumes to be male for the purposes of this discussion) did not marry: "Furthermore, they eschew marriage because they clearly discern it to be the sole or the principal danger to the maintenance of the communal life, as well as because they practice continence. For no Essene takes a wife, because a wife is a selfish creature, excessively jealous, and an adept at beguiling the morals of her husband and seducing him by her continued impostures. . . . For he who is either fast bound in the love lures of his wife or under the stress of nature makes his children his first care ceases to be the same to others and unconsciously has become a different man and has passed from freedom into slavery" (*Hypothetica*, 11.14–17). Philo gives no other indication that there might have been women among the Essenes.

Josephus, however, knows differently. He reports that there were two kinds of Essenes, those who did not marry, and who ensured the continuity of their communities by taking in new members from the outside, and those who propagated in the traditional manner, by marrying and having children. Josephus is quick to emphasize, though, that the marrying Essenes had wives only for procreation, and that once their wives became pregnant, the men discontinued sexual relationships with them. Josephus's very language implies that the women were not Essenes but only the wives of Essenes, as compared with Philo's careful language which makes it clear that women were not a subset of the male Therapeutae but, rather, that contemplatives came in two varieties, female and male, Therapeutrides and Therapeutae (*The Jewish War*, 2:160–61).

The archaeological evidence from Qumran does not help to clarify this much. A small number of women's graves were found during preliminary excavations of the cemetery at Qumran, virtually all aligned differently from those of the male skeletons. See E. M. Laperrousaz, *Qumran: L'établissement essenien des bords de la Mer Morte: Histoire et archéologie du site* (Paris: A. & J. Picard, 1976), esp. 19–25. A discussion of additional evidence on the presence of older ascetic women at Qumran may be found in Joseph M. Baumgarten, "4Q502, Marriage or Golden Age Ritual?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 34 (1983): 125–35, who deduces their presence from a recently published text (M. Baillet, *Qumran Grotte 4: Discoveries in the Judean Desert VIII* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982], text 502, 81–105). Baumgarten disagrees with the text's editor that the papyrus fragments contain a marriage ritual, suggesting instead that it refers to a ritual celebrating senior members of the community, both male and female: he cites the Therapeutrides as another instance of elderly ascetic Jewish women. For a helpful discussion of women among the Essenes and at Qumran, with detailed references, see Meeks (n. 26 above), 178–79, n. 70.

ity, or asceticism unconnected with eschatology, such as that at Mareotis, may have held considerably more appeal for women.

The appeal of the philosophical life itself should not be discounted, although both for Christian and Jewish women, and indeed men, the contemplative life of prayer and study was possible only with sufficient economic support, either that with which contemplatives themselves endowed communities or that which others contributed. Communities such as the Essenes, and many later Christian ascetics, could support themselves by manual labor and achieve reasonable economic self-sufficiency, but societies like the Therapeutics were clearly dependent on endowments and/or benefactors to provide buildings, books, clothing, and food, modest though those might have been. Ascetics in general, especially contemplative ascetics, are likely to have experienced a tension between the goals of the ascetic life, particularly withdrawal from the world, and the economic realities of survival. All of this may also explain why there seem to have been so few contemplatives.

In antiquity, those who chose the philosophic life made choices about the kinds of communities and symbolic systems in which to live that life. The structure and symbols of the Therapeutics afforded the Therapeutrides an ideal opportunity to measure themselves as women, and as Jews, and to find themselves acceptable where others might have deemed them, and they might have deemed themselves, less acceptable by virtue of their childlessness. In fact, it seems that the Therapeutae welcomed women on a basis fairly close to equality, provided, of course, that the women came as close to being men as was possible.

If in Philo's eyes the Therapeutrides were no longer women and if the Therapeutrides (and their male fellow contemplatives) shared this notion, it might suggest that despite their active presence and participation at Mareotis, they were not a community of women in some literal sense. Further, Therapeutic society did not provide much opportunity for communion among women, however they understood themselves. According to Philo, contact between any of the members was limited to Sabbath and festival observances, minimizing the possibility of strong interpersonal ties between individual Therapeutics. Whether there were preexisting relationships between any of the women, we simply do not know, although if it is true that the Therapeutrides were all highly educated women from relatively wealthy Jewish families, perhaps it would not be unreasonable to assume some prior social contacts.

However, we must be extremely careful about drawing conclusions from the possibility that the Therapeutrides were not a community of women in the same sense as later Christian monastic

women's houses or in the same sense as pagan women's religious associations such as the Bacchic *thiasoi*, especially since the Thera-peutrides are virtually the only example we have of a discrete community of Jewish women in late antiquity. It has been a regrettable tendency of some Christian feminist scholarship in the last fifteen years to assign the responsibility for Christian misogyny to the Jewish roots of Christianity and to argue for the superiority of Christianity over Judaism with regard to the opportunities and alternatives Christianity offered for women in this period, although other Christian feminist scholars are attuned to the pitfalls inherent in such an approach.⁸² To the extent that we perceive distinct communities of women to provide significant advantages and opportunities for women that are absent in the larger society, the absence of such communities of Jewish women may feed anti-Jewish sentiment, albeit unintentionally.

We should look then briefly at one other possible example of a community of Jewish women in the Greco-Roman period. In a short, enigmatic passage in the New Testament Acts of the Apostles 16:12–13, we read that Paul and his traveling companions had arrived in Philippi, in Macedonia. "On the sabbath day, we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we expected to find a synagogue [*pro-seuchē*] and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come there."⁸³ One of those who listens to the Christian missionaries is a seller of purple goods from the city of Thyatira, a woman named Lydia whom the author describes with that problematic phrase *seboumenē ton theon*, often taken to designate a Gentile who participated in Jewish religious life.⁸⁴ Lydia accepts the Christian message

⁸² On the problem of Christian feminist anti-Judaism, see Judith Plaskow, "Blaming Jews . . . for the Birth of Patriarchy," *Lilith* 7 (1980): 11–13; Annette Daum, "Blaming Jews . . . for the Death of the Goddess," in the same issue, 12–13; Deborah McCauley and Annette Daum, "Jewish-Christian Feminist Dialogue: A Wholistic Vision," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 38, no. 3 (1983): 147–92; and Brooten, "Jewish Women's History in the Roman Period" (n. 4 above), 22–30.

⁸³ Translation adapted from the Revised Standard Version, which translates the Greek term *proseuchē* as a "place of prayer." Here I have followed Bernadette Brooten's critique that the standard translation for *proseuchē* in Luke, synagogue, is avoided precisely because (only) women are mentioned; see "Early Christian Women and the Cultural Context: Issues of Method in Historical Reconstruction," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), which reiterates the discussion in Brooten's *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* (n. 4 above), 139–40.

⁸⁴ The debate about God-fearers concerns whether there were persons not born Jewish who became attracted to Jewish observances and beliefs, who did not convert to Judaism in a formal way, but who nevertheless were recognized as a separate and distinct category. Recently, A. Thomas Kraabel has argued strongly that the various phrases translated as God-fearers (*sebomenos/ē*, *phoboumenos/ē*, *theosebēs/ē*, *me-*

and is baptized with her household, after which she successfully prevails upon the itinerant missionaries to stay with her.

Virtually all of the scholarship on this passage has centered around the figure of Lydia herself, her possible role as the subsequent head of a house church, her economic and financial status as an indicator of the social location of early Christian converts, and finally, the implications of this passage for the debate about the existence of pagan adherents to Judaism and their role in the spread of Christianity.⁸⁵ In this discussion, a significant aspect of the passage has escaped attention, namely, the reference to a Sabbath gathering of women by the riverbank of Philippi.

Numerous other texts in Acts describe the efforts of Paul and his companions to preach about Jesus in Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath as routine.⁸⁶ Why they are portrayed as expecting or assuming to find a place of prayer along the riverbank is unclear. Paul and his companions express no surprise at their discovery of a group of women, nor is there any hint in the text that men (other than the Christians) are also present, in comparison to those many passages describing the conversion of men and women together.⁸⁷ It is possible that this brief account describes the historical practice of a group of Jewish women in Philippi who gathered on the Sabbath to pray. Whether they are all, like Lydia, non-Jews by birth who have adopted Jewish practices and beliefs or whether some (or even most) are born Jews cannot be determined from the text. There is

tuens, etc.) cannot be construed as a technical term ("The Disappearance of the God-Fearers," *Numen* 28 [1981]: 113–26, "The Roman Diaspora: Six Questionable Assumptions," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 [1982]: 445–64, and "Greeks, Jews and Lutherans in the Middle Half of Acts," in Nicklesburg and MacRae, eds. [n. 4 above], 147–57), but others have construed the evidence quite differently. See, e.g., John G. Gager, "Jews, Gentiles and Synagogues in the Book of Acts," in Nicklesburg and MacRae, eds., 91–99; and Tom Finn, "The God-Fearers Reconsidered," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 75–84. Additional bibliography can be found in all four articles. A newly published inscription from ancient Aphrodisias has been read by a number of scholars as evidence against Kraabel's interpretation: see Joyce Reynolds and Robert Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias: Greek Inscriptions with Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1987).

⁸⁵ On the figure of Lydia and other women in the early Christian missionary movement, see Schüssler Fiorenza (n. 44 above), 160–204; and Brooten, *Early Christian Women and Women Leaders*. A fascinating treatment of Philippi in the early Christian period, including some discussion of the historicity of Lydia and a Jewish community in Philippi in the first century may be found in Valerie Abrahamson, "The Rock Reliefs and the Cult of Diana at Philippi" (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 1986).

⁸⁶ For example, Acts 13:5, 13:14 ff., 14:1 ff, 17:1 ff., etc.

⁸⁷ For example, Acts 17:4, 17:22.

evidence that women figured predominantly among the many non-Jews who adopted Jewish practices in the Greco-Roman world.⁸⁸

Despite these fragments of information about the Therapeutrides and the women in Philippi, it is questionable whether the notion of female community played a significant role in Jewish women's religious practices in the Greco-Roman period. In part, this may be attributable to the differences between a polytheistic society and an apparently monotheistic one. In the polytheistic milieu of the ancient western world, religious responsibilities were often apportioned on the basis of gender, with women frequently responsible for religious rites and deities associated with fertility. Such responsibilities sometimes required women to gather together on specified occasions and at regular intervals, perhaps providing some of the benefits of women's communities for the participants.⁸⁹ In the monotheistic culture of ancient Israel and early Judaism, some religious obligations were binding on both men and women, while others were gender specific. But in contrast with women's rites in pagan religions, those assigned to Jewish women were not performed within a community of women separated from the configurations of ordinary social life. Further, women did not have the ritual responsibility for the fertility of the community.

Only with the advent of Christianity does evidence for voluntary and permanent communities of women emerge. And within Christianity, the development of such permanent communities is almost always within an ascetic framework. In early Christian communities, this asceticism seems voluntary on the part of most women and provides them with ways to avoid or minimize the constraints of contemporary society. But in time, Christian asceticism became as much a means to confine and control women as a means for them to seek release from the oppressive strictures of a male-dominated society.

What this suggests is that the concept of communities of women, understood as groups of women living separately from men, on a

⁸⁸ R. Kraemer, "The Conversion of Women to Judaism in the Greco-Roman Period" (unpublished paper read to the Women in the Biblical World Section, Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting, Dallas, 1983). Some of the scholars who have assumed the predominance of female converts include G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Three Centuries of the Christian Era*, vol. 1, *The Age of the Tannaim* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930), 326; Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1960), 256; Albert S. Goldstein, "Conversion to Judaism in Bible Times," in *Conversion to Judaism: A History and Analysis*, ed. David Max Eichhorn (New York: KTAV, 1965), 15.

⁸⁹ See, e.g., R. Kraemer, "Ecstasy and Possession: The Attraction of Women to the Cult of Dionysus," *Harvard Theological Review* 72 (1979): 55-80.

voluntary and permanent basis (and probably with some degree of economic autonomy) may be modeled too exclusively on the experiences of Christian women. I would suggest that by expanding the concept to encompass those aspects of daily life that afforded women a sense of *communitas* with other women, we may be able to gain a better appreciation of Jewish women in the Greco-Roman period and may obtain an enriched, broadened understanding of the meaning of “communities of women.”

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TAKING IT LIKE A MAN: MASCULINITY IN 4 MACCABEES

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Some of the most innovative work in classical studies in recent years has centered on the cultural construction of gender in Greek and Roman antiquity. Feminist classicists, together with classicists concerned primarily with conceptions of masculinity, have raised key questions about how femininity and masculinity were construed during this period.¹ Influenced by the second and third volumes of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, for example, scholars such as David M. Halperin and John J. Winkler have attempted to measure the gap, if not the gulf, that exists between the ancient Greek and Latin words *ἄνθρωπος*, *ἄνθρωπος*, *ἄρσεν*, *homo*, *vir*, *masculus*, and their cognates, on the one hand, and the English words "man," "male," "masculine," and their cognates, on the other.² On the basis of such work it is now possible to hazard a broad definition

¹ For discussion and bibliographies of relevant feminist work in classics, see N. Sorkin Rabinowitz and A. Richlin, eds., *Feminist Theory and the Classics* (New York: Routledge, 1993). One of the most influential early works was S. B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975). Early collections included J. Peradotto and J. P. Sullivan, eds., *Women in the Ancient World*, *Arethusa* 11 (1978); H. P. Foley, ed., *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* (New York: Gordon & Breach Science Publishers, 1981); A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt, eds., *Images of Women in Antiquity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983).

² See M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2, *The Use of Pleasure*; Vol. 3, *The Care of the Self* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985, 1986); D. M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990); J. J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (The New Ancient World; New York: Routledge, 1990); D. M. Halperin, J. J. Winkler, and F. I. Zeitlin, eds., *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990). All of these books attend carefully, although not exclusively, to the cultural construction of masculinity in antiquity. On the relationship between the work of feminist classicists and that of Halperin and Winkler, see M. B. Skinner, "Zeus and Leda: The Sexuality Wars in Contemporary Classical Scholarship," *Thamyris* 3 (1996) 103–23. For applications to rabbinic texts of the work of classicists on the construction of gender (especially the work influenced by Foucault), see M. L. Satlow, "'They Abused Him Like a Woman': Homoeroticism, Gender Blurring, and the Rabbis in Late

of the hegemonic conception of masculinity in the ancient Mediterranean world. Mastery—of others and/or of oneself—is the definitive masculine trait in most of the Greek and Latin literary and philosophical texts that survive from antiquity. In certain of these texts, as we shall see, a (free) man's right to dominate others—women, children, slaves, and other social inferiors—is justified by his capacity to dominate himself. Moreover, as we shall also see, this hegemonic conception of masculinity was less a dichotomy between male and female than a hierarchical continuum where slippage from most fully masculine to least masculine could occur. The individual male's position on this precarious continuum was never entirely secure. Especially intriguing to us are texts in which control of others is radically devalued in favor of self-control, the latter being represented as the supreme index of masculinity. Such a text is 4 Maccabees. Interest in 4 Maccabees is currently high among scholars of Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity. Attention to its gender dynamics should be an impor-

Antiquity," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1994) 1–25; idem, *Tasting the Dish: Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality* (BJS 303; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), esp. 1ff., 185–222 passim; idem, "'Try to Be a Man': The Rabbinic Construction of Masculinity," *HTR* 89 (1996) 19–40; idem, "Jewish Constructions of Nakedness in Late Antiquity," *JBL* 116 (1997) 429–54; D. Boyarin, "Are There Any Jews in 'The History of Sexuality'?" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1995) 333–55, and also much of his *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics 25; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Foucault's conclusions were anticipated in part by K. J. Dover (*Greek Homosexuality, Updated and with a New Postscript* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989; orig. ed. 1978]), among others, and have been critiqued most recently by S. Goldhill (*Foucault's Virginity: Ancient Erotic Fiction and the History of Sexuality* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995]), who, however, also builds on them. Biblical scholars are only beginning to harness this body of work; see, e.g., S. K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) esp. 42–82 passim; D. B. Martin, "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18–32," *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995) esp. 339ff.; idem, "Arsenokoitês and Malakos: Meanings and Consequences," in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture* (ed. Robert L. Brawley; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1996) 117–36; idem, "Contradictions of Masculinity: Ascetic Inseminators and Menstruating Men in Greco-Roman Culture," in *Constructing Genealogies* (ed. Valerie Finucci; Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming); cf. idem, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) esp. 3–37, 174–79. Studies centered on masculinity in biblical texts but owing little or nothing to parallel studies in classics have also begun to appear; see, e.g., H. Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston: Beacon, 1994); J. A. Glancy, "Unveiling Masculinity: The Construction of Gender in Mark 6:17–29," *Biblical Interpretation* 11 (1994) 34–50; D. J. A. Clines, "David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible," in his *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Gender, Culture, Theory 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 212–43; idem, "Ecce Vir, or Gendering the Son of Man," in *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies: The Third Sheffield Colloquium* (ed. J. C. Exum and S. D. Moore; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, forthcoming); M. C. Parsons, "Hand in Hand: Autobiographical Reflections on Luke 15," *Semeia* 72 (1995) 125–52; S. D. Moore, *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (New York: Routledge, 1996) esp. 75–138; H. C. Washington, "Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Hebrew Bible: A New Historicist Approach," *Biblical*

tant part of the ongoing discussion.³ Drawing on classical scholarship we will show how 4 Maccabees both subverts and supports the ancient hegemonic construction of masculinity.

Through the medium of a baroque rhetorical style (the florid Asianic style as distinct from the more restrained Attic style), 4 Maccabees tells the hortatory tale of how Eleazar, an aged Jewish philosopher (specifically, a Stoic sage), and seven unnamed Jewish boys (μειράκια, 11:24; cf. 11:13) defeat a Gentile tyrant.⁴ Eleazar and the boys outman Antiochus Epiphanes, who has them tortured to death for their faithfulness to their ancestral religion. That a physically feeble old man (cf. 7:13) and a small group of boys should overcome an elite

Interpretation 5 (1997) 324–63. Across the humanities and social sciences, the literature on masculinity is already vast; for bibliography on ancient and contemporary masculinities, see, e.g., A. Cornwell and N. Lindisfarne, eds., *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies* (Male Orders; New York: Routledge, 1994) 214–30.

³ R. Darling Young made an excellent start in her pathbreaking essay, “The ‘Woman with the Soul of Abraham’: Traditions About the Mother of the Maccabean Martyrs,” in *Women Like This: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. A.-J. Levine; SBLJL 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991) 67–82. A recent article by classicist B. D. Shaw (“Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 [1996] 269–312) also has a provocative discussion of gender in 4 Maccabees. Influenced by the body of work mentioned above, his comments are part of a larger argument about the importance of endurance and patience in Hellenistic Jewish texts such as the *Testament of Joseph*, the *Testament of Job*, and 4 Maccabees, as well as a number of early Christian martyrological texts.

⁴ It is probably best classified as an epideictic speech (see H.-J. Klauck, *4 Makkabäerbuch* [JSHRZ 3.6; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1989] 659). A variety of dates have been suggested for it, ranging from the mid-first century BCE to the mid-second century CE, or even later. E. J. Bickerman’s thesis that it was composed sometime between 18 and 54 CE has proved the most influential (“The Date of Fourth Maccabees,” in *Studies in Jewish and Christian History* [2 vols.; AGJU 9; Leiden: Brill, 1976] 1.275–81 [rev. version of a 1945 original]), convincing scholars such as M. Hadas (*The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees* [New York: Harper & Row, 1953] 95–96 [he attempts to narrow Bickerman’s dates to ca. 40–41 CE]), S. K. Stowers (“4 Maccabees,” *HBC* 923), and H. Anderson (“4 Maccabees,” *OTP* 2.534; “Fourth Maccabees,” *ABD* 4.453). Unconvinced by Bickerman, J. W. van Henten opts instead for a date in the early second century CE (“Datierung und Herkunft des Vierten Makkabäerbuches,” in *Tradition and Reinterpretation in Jewish and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honor of Jürgen C. H. Lebram* [ed. J. W. van Henten et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1986] 137–45), following A. Dupont-Sommer (*Le Quatrième Livre des Machabées: Introduction, traduction et notes* [Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1939] 75–81) and U. Breitenstein (*Beobachtungen zu Sprache, Stil und Gedankengut des Vierten Makkabäerbuchs* [Basel/Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1978] 173–75, 179). J. M. G. Barclay, too, opts for a later date, although not quite second century (*Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan* [323 B.C.E.–117 C.E.] [Edinburgh: Clark, 1996] 369–80), while D. A. Campbell suggests a date no earlier than 135 CE (*The Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans 3.21–26* [JSNTSup 65; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992] 221–28). Whatever fragile consensus might be said to have been created by Bickerman’s essay is now apparently crumbling. The identity of the author of 4 Maccabees is also unknown, as is the place of composition, although Antioch has most often been suggested (e.g., Dupont-Sommer, *Quatrième Livre*, 69–73; Hadas, *Maccabees*, 111–13; Anderson, “4 Maccabees,” 535; van Henten, “Datierung und Herkunft,” 146–49).

male in his prime challenges the hegemonic concept of masculinity, as we shall show. What is even more striking, however, is that the (similarly unnamed) mother of the seven boys also “takes it like a man.” The exemplary self-mastery the boys demonstrate proves them worthy of the designation “men” (14:11), but so does the even greater self-mastery displayed by their elderly, widowed mother (15:23, 28–30; 16:14), who endures still greater agonies (14:11; cf. 16:2). Paradoxically, as we shall see, the prime exemplar of masculinity in 4 Maccabees is a woman.

I. “Put Us to the Test Then, Tyrant”: Trials of Manhood

In the Greco-Roman world the four cardinal virtues were prudence (φρόνησις), temperance (σωφροσύνη), justice (δικαιοσύνη), and courage (ἀνδρεία).⁵ Aristotle and the Stoics inherited this four-part schema, as did Philo of Alexandria (esp. *Leg. all.* 1.63–72), the author of the Wisdom of Solomon (8:7), and the author of 4 Maccabees.⁶ The latter adduces all four virtues and construes them as manifestations of “devout reason” (ὁ εὐσεβῆς λογισμός), by which he means reason subservient to the Mosaic law.⁷ Or as he himself puts it, “Now reason [λογισμός] is the mind that with unerring logic esteems the life of wisdom [τὸν σοφίας βίον]” (1:15).⁸ And wisdom is nothing other than “instruction in the law [ἡ τοῦ νόμου παιδεία]” (1:17). But the forms of wisdom, for this

⁵ As classically formulated by Plato; see esp. *Phd.* 69C.

⁶ 4 Maccabees is colored throughout by an unmistakable, if eclectic, Stoicism. Y. Gutman's and Hadas's arguments that the book is modeled on Plato's *Gorgias* are unconvincing. More compelling are R. Renehan's and Stowers's arguments that it has strong affinities with the middle Stoicism of Posidonius. See Hadas, *Maccabees*, 116–18, building upon Y. Gutman, “The Story of the Mother and her Seven Sons in the Agadah and in II and IV Maccabees” (in Hebrew), in *Commentationes Iudaico-Hellenisticae in Memoriam Ioannis Lewy* (ed. M. Schwabe and Y. Gutman; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1949) 35–37; R. Renehan, “The Greek Philosophical Background of Fourth Maccabees,” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 115 (1972) 232–38; Stowers, “4 Maccabees,” 924. Further on the philosophical underpinnings of the work, see Dupont-Sommer, *Quatrième Livre*, esp. 33–38; Breitenstein, *Beobachtungen*, 131–75 passim. Scholars are sharply divided on the question of whether 5:19–21 espouses or opposes the Stoic doctrine of the equality of sins, but that need not concern us here.

⁷ See D. C. Aune, “Mastery of the Passions: Philo, 4 Maccabees and Earliest Christianity,” in *Hellenization Revisited: Shaping a Christian Response within the Greco-Roman World* (ed. W. E. Helleman; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994) 135, who also notes: “As far as I have been able to determine, 4 Macc is the first (and only) occurrence of this phrase in the standard Greek literature previous to the second century CE” (ibid.). See also P. L. Redditt, “The Concept of Nomos in Fourth Maccabees,” *CBQ* 45 (1983) 249–70, who argues that νόμος functions in five ways in 4 Maccabees: “to teach the way of Jewish culture, to enable rational living, to encourage the faithful to persevere even in the face of persecution, to condemn/not condemn persons for their behavior, and to issue commands and prohibitions for right living” (p. 254).

⁸ Unless indicated, all translations of 2 and 4 Maccabees are ours, based on Rahlfs's text.

thoroughly hellenized Jew, consist of the four cardinal virtues. Of the four, “prudence [φρόνησις] is the most authoritative,⁹ since reason controls the passions [τῶν παθῶν] by means of it. Of the passions, the two most comprehensive types are pleasure and pain [ἡδονὴ τε καὶ πόνος] . . .” (1:19–20). And of the two, it is pain that most concerns our author. Through prudence, devout reason is able to master “the passions that impede courage [ἀνδρείας], namely rage, fear, and pain [θυμοῦ τε καὶ φόβου καὶ πόνου]” (1:4).

The principal virtue exhibited by the heroes of our tale, therefore—Eleazar, the seven brothers, and their mother—will be ἀνδρεία, hence the usefulness of 4 Maccabees for examining constructions of masculinity in the Greco-Roman world. For as every student of elementary Greek knows, ἀνδρεία derives from ἀνὴρ (“man”), so that its root meaning is “manliness.”¹⁰ Indeed, given that ἀνδρεία and its cognates (ἀνδρείος, ἀνδρείως, ἀνδρίζομαι, etc.) frequently mean just that—“manliness” and *its* cognates (“manly,” “manfully,” “to play the man,” etc.)—in both classical and *koine* Greek, it is not too much to suggest that built into the language itself was the notion that to act courageously was to act as befits a man. Thus, courage was conceived of as essentially a masculine virtue. “I could prove to you from many different examples that reason is sovereign master of the passions,” claims the author of 4 Maccabees, “but I can demonstrate it best from the manly courage [ἀνδραγαθίας] of those who died for the sake of virtue, Eleazar and the seven brothers and their mother” (1:7–8).

As much as anything else, 4 Maccabees is about what it means to be a true man. In 4 Maccabees the two types of sovereignty associated with masculinity—sovereignty over others and sovereignty over oneself—are implicitly contrasted. The book deftly recycles the Cynic-Stoic commonplace that the kingdom that counts is the kingdom within. To the mind God gave the law, avers the author, “and he who is subject to it shall rule over a kingdom [βασιλεύσει βασιλείαν] that is temperate, just, good, and courageous [ἀνδρείαν]” (2:23). Antiochus Epiphanes exemplifies the hegemonic male who possesses absolute power in the outward, material realm. Now, according to the philosophical tradition in which our author stands (the philosophic *koine* of the Greco-Roman world),¹¹ in order to be deemed worthy of dominating others, one first had to be able to dominate oneself. Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, for example, states that to rule over “willing subjects” is “a gift of the gods . . .

⁹ This is classic Stoic doctrine. According to Zeno of Citium, σωφροσύνη, δικαιοσύνη, and ἀνδρεία are mere manifestations of φρόνησις (*Stoic.* 1.200–201). Philo, whose Middle Platonism contains a strong admixture of Stoicism, also regards φρόνησις as the preeminent virtue (*Leg. all.* 1.71).

¹⁰ See J. A. Goldstein, *II Maccabees* (AB 41A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 307.

¹¹ See Renehan, “Philosophic Background,” 227.

bestowed on those who have been initiated into self-discipline [σωφροσύνη]” (21.12).¹² So how does Antiochus measure up?

At the conclusion of his encomium to the martyred Eleazar, the author of 4 Maccabees notes that “some men seem to be ruled by their passions [παθοκρατεῖσθαι] because of the weakness of their reason. . . . Only the wise and manly individual [ὁ σοφὸς καὶ ἀνδρεῖος] is ruler [κύριος] of the passions” (7:20–23).¹³ The author then subtly introduces the paradox of the absolute ruler who is slave to his own passions:

For when the tyrant had been publicly defeated in his first attempt, being unable to compel an old man to eat defiling foods, then in violent rage [σφόδρα περιπαθῶς] he commanded that others of the Hebrew captives be brought, and that any who ate defiling food would afterwards be released, but if any refused he would torture them even more viciously [πικρότερον βασανίζειν]. (8:2)

This sets the scene for all that ensues. The physical torture of the youths and the psychological torture of their mother will prove their remarkable self-control, and hence their “manliness.” But the torture itself, characterized by excess, is occasioned by the inability of Antiochus to control his own passions, especially his rage. The point is driven home by the following statement, which introduces the torture of the eldest brother: “When they [the seven brothers] had said these things, the tyrant was not only indignant [ἐχάλεπαινεν], as at men who are disobedient, but also enraged [ὠργίσθη], as at men who are ungrateful. Then at his command the guards brought forward the eldest”—and the torture commences (9:10–11). We have now been told twice that Antiochus abandoned himself to anger in initiating the torture of the brothers. Rage is implied also in 10:17, in which “the bloodthirsty, murderous, and utterly despicable Antiochus,” unable any longer to endure the defiant taunts of the fourth brother, orders that his tongue be cut out (cf. 2 Macc 7:4, 10). Already in 10:5 the tyrant’s fury has infected his subordinates: “Thoroughly infuriated [πικρῶς ἐνέγκαντες] by the man’s [the third brother’s] boldness, they dislocated his hands and feet with their instruments. . . .”¹⁴

What is the virtue that should have enabled Antiochus to curb his rage, to

¹² Translation from S. B. Pomeroy, *Xenophon, Oeconomicus: A Social and Historical Commentary with a New English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994). Foucault lists and discusses many similar examples (*Use of Pleasure*, 75–77, 82–83; *Care of the Self*, 84–86, 94–95).

¹³ Compare Philo, *Mig.* 197: “We call wisdom kingship for we call the sage a king” (also *Wis* 6:20).

¹⁴ Greek authors regularly represented “barbarians” as being incapable of controlling their passions (E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1989] 80–84, 124–33). “So gentiles . . . suffer the same depiction at the hands of Jewish writers,” adds Stowers (*Romans*, 60). Cf. Satlow, “Try to Be a Man,” 35–36, which notes how certain rabbinic texts associate Gentiles with women as lacking masculine self-control.

keep it under control? The author has already informed us. Reason (λογισμός) should rule over the passions “that impede ἀνδρεία, namely rage [θυμός], fear, and pain” (1:4). But if the torture of the seven youths is an expression of rage on the part of the tyrant, and as such a failure of ἀνδρεία (“manliness”), it is also the occasion for a stunning exhibition of ἀνδρεία on the part of the youths themselves and their elderly mother. By yielding to rage Antiochus has compromised his masculinity; by overcoming fear (φόβος) and pain (πόνος) the martyrs have confirmed theirs.¹⁵

Indeed, as interpreted by Eleazar earlier, the ordeal represented by the torture is precisely a trial of manliness. Eleazar boldly informs the king that the Mosaic law “teaches us temperance [σωφροσύνη] so that we are in control of all our pleasures and desires, and it also trains us in manliness [ἀνδρεία], so that we endure all suffering willingly . . .” (5:23; cf. 10:9–10). Then he boasts: “I am neither so old nor so unmanly [ἄνανδρος] as not to be young in reason on behalf of piety. So get the torture wheels ready and fan the fire more vigorously!” (5:31–32).¹⁶ (The brothers later imitate Eleazar’s challenge: “But if old men of the Hebrews lived piously because of their religion and endured torture, it is even more fitting that we who are young should die despising your coercive tortures, which our aged instructor [ὁ παιδευτὴς ἡμῶν γέρων] also overcame. . . . Put us to the test [πείραξε] then, tyrant . . .” [9:6–7; cf. 9:17–18; 10:16].)¹⁷ When Eleazar has finally expired, the author exclaims in the course of his panegyric to him: “O aged man, mightier than tortures; O elder, fiercer than fire. . . . But most wonderful of all, though he was an old man, the tautness of his body having slackened, his muscles having become flabby and his sinews feeble [λελυμένων μὲν ἤδη τῶν τοῦ σώματος τόνων περικεχαλασμένων δὲ τῶν

¹⁵ Antiochus’s rage resembles that of Nebuchadnezzar and the faithfulness of the youths, that of the three young men in Dan 3:13–30, a story referred to in 4 Macc 13:9; 16:3, 21; 18:12. Shaw (“Body/Power/Identity,” 271–73) notes a similar loss of control by those in authority in Achilles Tatius’s *Leukippe* (6.18–22) and in Jerome’s account of an innocent woman accused of adultery (*Ep* 1 [CSEL 54.1–9]).

¹⁶ In 2 Macc. 7:27 Eleazar declares, “by manfully [ἀνδρείως] giving up my life now, I shall show myself worthy of my old age.” Compare, too, *Mart. Pol.* 9.1, in which the hero, also elderly, hears a heavenly voice urging, “Be strong, Polycarp, act like a man,” as he enters the arena for the final test. Discussing Phlm 9, C. S. Wansink argues: “There is reason to believe that an appeal to age would have created pathos. Ancient writers often refer to the tension and anxiety created when the elderly are forced to undergo public humiliation, torture or martyrdom” (*Chained in Christ: The Experience and Rhetoric of Paul’s Imprisonments* [JSNTSup 130; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996] 163). His prime example is 4 Maccabees, although he also cites Philo, *In Flacc.* 4; Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.28; *The Martyrs of Lyons* 28; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.39.2.

¹⁷ Commenting on 2 Macc 6:18–7:42, Young remarks: “The author has constructed the narrative to demonstrate how effective Eleazar’s ὑπόδειγμα was, because the very example of manliness which he provided is immediately followed by the startling accounts of the ‘manliness’ of children and of a woman” (“Soul of Abraham,” 70). The comment is even more true of 4 Maccabees.

σαρκῶν κεκμηκότων δὲ καὶ τῶν νεύρων], he became young again in spirit by means of reason, and by reason like Isaac's triumphed over the multi-headed rack" (7:10–14).¹⁸ Compare the sixth brother, physically still a boy (μειρακίσκος, 11:13), who proudly informs Antiochus: "I am younger in years than my brothers, but just as mature mentally [τῇ δὲ διανοίᾳ ἡλικιώτης]" (11:14). This statement would apply also to the seventh brother, presumably, who is still younger in years.¹⁹ Following their martyrdom both are accounted "men" along with their elder brothers: "Do not consider it amazing that reason retained control over those men [τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐκείνων] in their torture" (14:11; cf. 1:10). And prior to their martyrdom the author invited us to imagine the self-pity to which the brothers might have yielded if some of them had been cowardly and "unmanly" (ἄνδρῳ, 8:16; cf. 8:17–26; 16:5–11). All in all, the message is plain in the case of the younger brothers, as in the case of Eleazar: true masculinity inheres in rational self-mastery rather than in a manly physique.

The author's Jewish spin on this philosophical commonplace is that reason in turn must be ruled by the Torah. As such, faithful adherence to "the paternal law" (ὁ πατριος νόμος, 5:32; cf. 8:7) is implicitly cast in 4 Maccabees as the quintessential expression of masculinity. Observant Jews are a superior race of "men" (even when they happen to be anatomically female), since they are ruled not by reason alone but by "devout reason" (ὁ εὐσεβὴς λογισμός), reason subservient to the Torah. The Maccabean martyrologies, like the court tales of Daniel 1–6, can thus be said to exhibit a "ruled ethnic perspective."²⁰ What John J. Collins has to say of the court tales applies *mutatis mutandis* to the martyrologies: "They are affirmations of the enduring worth, even superiority, of people who have lost political power."²¹ Note, for example, the elder brother's boast to his torturers: "Your wheel is not so strong, filthy lackeys, as to strangle my reason. Sever my limbs, burn my flesh, twist my joints, and through all these torments I will prove to you that the children of the Hebrews alone are invinci-

¹⁸ Isaac's greatness, for our author, inheres in the fact that "seeing his father's hand wielding a knife and descending upon him did not flinch" (16:20). To the author's assertion that Eleazar "became young again in spirit [ἀνενέασεν τῷ πνεύματι]," compare the conception of manhood exhibited in the *Shepherd of Hermas*. As S. Young has shown, being manly in the *Shepherd* means, in part, "overcoming the weariness associated with old age by recovering one's youthful vigor" ("Being a Man: The Pursuit of Manliness in *The Shepherd of Hermas*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 [1994] 250).

¹⁹ *Lam. Rab.* 1:50, in a variant form of our tale (more on this below), whimsically gives the age of the youngest brother at his death as two years, six months, and six-and-a-half hours. Following his debate with the tyrant on the finer points of the scriptural teaching on idolatry, he is allowed to nurse at his mother's breast.

²⁰ L. M. Wills's term (*The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends* [HDR 26; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990] 68).

²¹ J. J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 44.

ble where virtue is concerned [ὑπὲρ ἀρετῆς εἰσιν ἀνίκητοι]” (9:18). As such, the Jewish martyrs in 4 Maccabees (like those in 2 Macc 7:12) are models of masculine virtue, even for the Gentiles:

Who did not marvel at the athletes [ἀθλητάς] of the divine legislation? Who were not astounded? The tyrant himself and his whole council marveled at their endurance. . . . For the tyrant Antiochus, when he observed the manliness of their virtue [τὴν ἀνδρείαν αὐτῶν τῆς ἀρετῆς] and their endurance under the tortures, commended them to his soldiers as an example for their own endurance, and this made them brave and manly [γενναίους καὶ ἀνδρείους] for infantry battle and siege, and he ravaged and conquered all his enemies. (4 Macc 17:16–24; cf. 6:12–13; 17:17)²²

But if the Jewish law is the supreme ally of reason in 4 Maccabees, the Gentile tyrant is the supreme ally of the passions. Antiochus is temptation incarnate in a passage such as 5:5–13, for example, his seductive advice to Eleazar (“Why should you abhor eating the very excellent meat of this animal?”), or 8:5–11, his flattering address to the seven brothers (“Young men, I admire you each and every one and wish to show you favor”), or 12:3–5, his “compassionate” plea with the single surviving brother (“If you yield to persuasion you shall be my friend and have charge of the affairs of my kingdom”). For the author of 4 Maccabees, the tyrant’s brutal physical coercion is but the graphic externalization of the internal coercion that every true “man” must resist. For the notion of masculinity that undergirds the book is that *external*

²² Shaw argues that the endurance (ὑπομονή) we see in this passage and elsewhere in 4 Maccabees is the book’s preeminent virtue and a “novel value” (“Body/Power/Identity,” 278–79). He also argues that the martyrs’ endurance would have been seen “as weak, womanish, slavish, and therefore morally bad” (p. 279) in terms of the dominant male ideology of the day. In 4 Maccabees, Shaw argues, one finds “the explicit cooption of passivity in resistance as a fully legitimized male quality—a choice that could be made by thinking, reasoning and logical men” (p. 280). We agree with Shaw that the theme of the mastery of the passions and the framework of the athletic—and, we would add, martial—contest involve the deployment of traditional social values (pp. 277–78). We also agree that the book focuses on resistance to illegitimate power and presents suffering and death in accord with devout reason as a legitimate male activity. But we disagree with his contention that endurance is the preeminent virtue or a (completely) novel value in 4 Maccabees. Our own reading suggests that virtues such as manly courage, self-control, and justice fly under the banner of mastery of the passions through devout reason or its twin, prudence (cf. 1:19). Endurance is not described as a discrete value more important than others, but is closely tied to self-mastery and the virtue of manly courage. The martyrs’ manly courage and endurance are proof that they have mastered the passions. We also find that the masculine quality of endurance is assumed rather than argued in the book, suggesting that Shaw has overstated the novelty of this view of endurance. In the passage quoted above, for example, Antiochus unapologetically commends the endurance of the martyrs to his soldiers “as an example for their own endurance,” which example renders them “brave and manly.” In 15:30 the mother is described as more noble than males in καρτερία and more manly than men in ὑπομονή. Furthermore, if endurance were under question as a masculine value in 4 Maccabees, the irony of a feeble old man, seven young boys, and an aged woman exhibiting it as a mark of their manliness—a central irony in the book, as we argue—would be lost.

control exercised over others does not a man make, but only *internal* control exercised over oneself. The malignant tyranny of the Gentile tyrant, therefore, is pointedly contrasted with the beneficial tyranny of reason tempered by the Jewish law: "O reason of the children [i.e., the sons], tyrant [τύραννε] over the passions!" (15:1; cf. 1:13).

In a paroxysm of apostrophe, Eleazar at one point exclaims: "I shall not play you false, O Law my instructor, nor shall I renounce you, beloved self-control [ἐγκράτεια]!" (5:33–34). The agonistic aspect of self-mastery was commonly expressed by ἐγκράτεια in antiquity, a term closely related in meaning to σωφροσύνη, although not identical to it. (Aristotle appears to have been the first to distinguish systematically between the two.²³) "*Enkrateia*, with its opposite, *akrasia*, is located on the axis of struggle, resistance, and combat," notes Foucault; "it is self-control, tension, 'continence,'" the repression of the passions. In general, it refers "to the dynamics of a domination of oneself by oneself and to the effort that this demands."²⁴ Although ἐγκράτεια occurs in 4 Maccabees only in 5:34,²⁵ the book is studded throughout with cognates of the term. In the first two chapters alone, for example, we read that the author's purpose is to inquire "whether reason is sovereign master [αὐτοκράτωρ] of the passions" (1:13); that "reason controls [ἐπικρατέω] the passions that hamper temperance" (1:3); that temperance "is control [ἐπικράτεια] over desires" (1:31); and that reason is also "able to control [ἐπικρατέω] the appetites" (1:33).²⁶ "The temperate Joseph" is praised "because through his mental faculties he gained control [περικρατέω] over sexual desire" (2:2). "And not only over the frenzied urge of sexual desire is reason seen to exercise control [ἐπικρατέω]," adds the author, "but over all desire" (2:4). It is through reason, moreover, that a man "is controlled [κρατέω] by the law" (2:9). The law can even "prevail over" (ἐπικρατέω) a man's natural affection for his wife (2:11). And so on.²⁷

Ἐγκράτεια received a distinctly masculine inflection in classical Greek literature; it was a manly virtue, a virile virtue.²⁸ The durability of this inflection is evident from the *Shepherd of Hermas* (late first to mid-second century CE), in which ἐγκράτεια is allegorized as a woman; her behavior, however, is said to be masculine. Hermas has a vision of a tower surrounded by seven women, the

²³ See H. F. North, *Sophrosyne* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966) 202–3; also chap. 6, "*Enkrateia*," of Foucault's *Use of Pleasure*.

²⁴ Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 65.

²⁵ It occurs elsewhere in the LXX only in Sir 18:29 as a textual variant. In the NT it is found in Acts 24:25; Gal 5:23; 2 Pet 1:6.

²⁶ The author's example is reason's capacity to control the craving for forbidden foods (1:33–34)—especially apt since the tyrant will later do his utmost to compel or entice the martyrs to eat such foods (see esp. 5:1–3, 6–9; 8:2, 12; 13:2–3).

²⁷ See also 1:5, 6; 2:6, 15, 20 (κρατέω); 1:9 (περικρατέω); 1:14; 2:14 (ἐπικρατέω).

²⁸ See Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 65–77 passim.

first of whom is Faith. Faith's daughter, "who has her garments tucked up and conducts herself as a man [ἀνδριζομένη], is called Self-Control [ἐγκράτεια]. . . . Whoever then follows her will become happy in his life, because he will restrain himself from all evil works, believing that, if he restrain himself from all evil desire, he will inherit eternal life" (*Herm. Vis.* 3.8).²⁹ In classical Greek literature, moreover, ἐγκράτεια was often cloaked in military or athletic metaphors.³⁰ Grimly taking up arms and emulating the well-disciplined soldier, one valiantly resisted the pitiless assaults of the passions, drove them back, and utterly defeated them. Alternatively, one faced off with them in the gymnasium or the stadium and vigorously wrestled them to the ground, or raced neck-and-neck with them for the prize.

Ἐγκράτεια was also a key term for the Stoics. And it was the Stoics who, following the Cynics, fully unfurled the philosophical motif of the moral struggle of the sage, compulsively couching it in martial, and especially athletic, imagery. "The true Agon of the sage is one of the most frequently recurring pictures in the moral discourses of Epictetus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Plutarch," writes Victor C. Pfitzner. "The contest into which a man enters, if he wishes to follow the Stoic way of life with its struggle against the desires and passions, and the whims of fortune which threaten to disrupt his peace of mind, is the Olympic contest of life itself."³¹

That 4 Maccabees is saturated with military and athletic metaphors should come as no surprise, therefore, given the Stoic affiliations of its author.³² In 3:6–18, for example, a martial anecdote is adduced to illustrate the author's martial philosophy. David has been fighting the Philistines all day and is parched with thirst. Although he has an abundance of water ready to hand, he is consumed by an "irrational desire" (ἀλόγιστος ἐπιθυμία) for a drink of the enemy's water. Two "vigorous young soldiers" (δύο νεανίσκοι στρατιῶται καρτεροί) voluntarily risk their necks to fill a pitcher of water for the king from the enemy's spring. Inspired by their manly example, David finally manages to

²⁹ ANF translation, modified. Young remarks on this and similar passages: "From the start it is evident that 'manliness' in the *Shepherd* cannot be a mere biological category; indeed, male anatomy is neither a necessary nor a sufficient precondition for 'being a man'" ("Being a Man," 238). The Christian adaptation of ἐγκράτεια tied it closely to the concept of chastity. As G. Sfameni Gasparro notes, "numerous sectors within early Christianity gave strong emphasis to *enkrateia* both in the sense of 'virginity' and 'marital continence' as a central value of the Christian life" ("Image of God and Sexual Differentiation in the Tradition of *Enkrateia*," in *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition* [ed. K. E. Borresen; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995] 134).

³⁰ Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 65–70, 72–74. His examples include Plato, *Rep.* 8.560B; 9.572D–573B; *Leg.* 1.647D; 8.840C; Xenophon, *Oec.* 1.23; *Mem.* 1.2, 19.

³¹ V. C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif: Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature* (NovTSup 16; Leiden: Brill, 1967) 29; cf. 28–35.

³² Pfitzner surveys the athletic imagery in 4 Maccabees (*Paul and the Agon Motif*, 57–64; cf. Shaw, "Body/Power/Identity," 278ff.; Breitenstein, *Beobachtungen*, 188). Philo, too, favored athletic and, to a lesser extent, military metaphors (Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, 38–48).

defeat his internal enemy, irrational desire: although still burning with thirst, he pours the dearly-bought drink out as a libation to God.³³ David's moral victory pales, however, beside that of the warrior-sage, Eleazar: "No city besieged with numerous and ingenious war machines has ever put up such resistance as did that most holy man. Although his sacred life was set ablaze with scourgings and rackings, he conquered [ἐνίκησεν] the besiegers with the shield of his devout reason [διὰ τὸν ὑπερασπίζοντα τῆς εὐσεβείας λογισμόν]" (7:4).³⁴ The mother, for her part, is saluted as a "soldier of God in piety's cause [δι' εὐσέβειαν θεοῦ στρατιῶτι]" (16:14).³⁵ Her eldest son boasts to his torturers that "the children of the Hebrews alone are invincible [ἀνίκητοι] where reason is concerned" (9:18), as we noted earlier, and then exhorts his fellows: "Imitate me, brothers; do not become deserters in my struggle [ἀγῶνα] or renounce our valiant brotherhood. Fight a sacred and noble fight [ιεράν καὶ εὐγενῆ στρατείαν στρατεύσασθε] for religion" (9:23–24). And Antiochus himself, observing "the manliness of their virtue" (τὴν ἀνδρείαν αὐτῶν τῆς ἀρετῆς) and their astonishing imperviousness to physical pain (their Stoic ἀπάθεια or ἀναισθησία, actually, although the author never uses either term),³⁶ commends them to his soldiers as a stirring example of martial prowess, with spectacular results, the metaphoric military conquests of the martyrs inspiring real military conquests on the part of the troops (17:16–24).

As for athletic metaphors, we are told that Eleazar, like a "noble athlete" (γενναῖος ἀθλητής), was victorious over his tormentors (6:10). The mother, for her part, merits the following apostrophe: "O mother of the nation, . . . winner of the prize in the contest of the heart [τοῦ διὰ σπλάγχχνων ἀγῶνος ἀθλοφόρε]!" (15:29). And her sons declare in unison, "Through this grievous suffering and endurance we shall obtain the prize of virtue [τὰ τῆς ἀρετῆς ὅθλα ἐξομεν]" (9:8). The final metaphor reserved for the mother and the sons in the book is also that of prizewinner: "But the sons of Abraham together with their mother, who carried away the prize [σὺν τῇ ἀθλοφόρῳ μητρί], are gathered together into the chorus of the fathers" (18:23). But the most elaborate athletic imagery is found in 17:11–16:

³³ The story differs significantly from the scriptural versions (2 Sam 23:13–17; 1 Chr 11:15–19; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 7.12.3).

³⁴ The metaphor of the sage as a besieged city was a stock Stoic theme, especially in the early Roman Empire (see Stowers, "4 Maccabees," 929–30).

³⁵ She is also hailed as "elder" (πρεσβύτι) in the same verse, "perhaps signifying an official of the synagogue," as Young surmises, yet another masculine title "to match the ἀνδρεία of her soul" ("Soul of Abraham," 78).

³⁶ S. Sandmel contrasts the martyrs of 4 Maccabees with the ten martyrs of the Hadrianic persecution depicted in rabbinic literature. The latter undergo "the acute pain which their fidelity enable[s] them to endure," whereas the former "are portrayed as completely immune to the pain" (*Judaism and Christian Beginnings* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1978] 279).

Divine indeed was the contest [ἀγών] in which they were engaged. For on that day virtue was the umpire [ἡθλοθέτει] and tested them for their endurance. The prize [νίκος] was incorruptibility in an endless life. Now, Eleazar was the first contestant [προγωνίζετο], but the mother of the seven sons also competed [ἐνήθλει], and the brothers, too, contended [ἡγωνίζοντο]. The tyrant was the competition [ἀντιγωνίζετο] and the world and the human race were the spectators [ἐθεώρει]. Piety was the victor [ἐνίκη] and awarded the crown to its own athletes [τοὺς ἐαυτῆς ἀθλητάς στεφανοῦσα]. Who did not marvel at the athletes [ἀθλητάς] of the divine legislation? Who were not astounded?

At one point, martial and athletic metaphors intertwine. The sixth brother, the mere boy (μειρακίσκος, 11:13), while being simultaneously broken on the wheel, roasted over a fire, and run through with red-hot skewers, cheerfully exclaims:

O contest [ἀγῶνος] befitting holiness, in which so many of us brothers have been summoned to an exercise in suffering [εἰς γυμνασίαν πόνων] for religion's sake, yet have not been conquered [οὐκ ἐνίκηθημεν]. For religious knowledge, O tyrant, is invincible [ἀνίκητος]. Fully armed [καθωπλισμένος] with nobility I, too, shall die with my brothers. (11:20–22)³⁷

And later we learn that the brothers had earlier resolved: “Let us fully arm ourselves [καθοπλισώμεθα], therefore, with the control of the passions [παθοκρατείαν] that comes from divine reason” (13:16).

As will by now be readily apparent, the real battle in 4 Maccabees is between the martyrs and themselves (although it is less a battle than a rout). A standard feature of popular Hellenistic moral philosophy was the distinction between the man who is “stronger than himself” (κρείττων ἑαυτοῦ), that is, able to rein in his passions and appetites, and the man who is “weaker than himself” (ἥττων ἑαυτοῦ), that is, a slave to his passions and appetites (and as such not fully a “man”).³⁸ Predictably, this stock antithesis also crops up in 4 Maccabees: “Since the seven brothers scorned sufferings even unto death, therefore, all must concede that devout reason is absolute sovereign [αὐτοδέσποτος] over the passions. For if they had been slaves to their passions [τοῖς πάθεσι

³⁷ See Plutarch, *Mor.* 40: “The boys in Sparta were lashed with whips during the entire day at the altar of Artemis Orthia, frequently to the point of death, and they bravely endured this, cheerful and proud, vying with one another for the supremacy as to which one of them could endure being beaten for the longer time and the greater number of blows. And the one who was victorious was held in especial repute” (LCL trans.). According to Hecataeus of Abdera, Moses expected Israelite youths “to cultivate manliness [ἀνδρείαν] and steadfastness, and generally to endure every hardship” (Diodorus Siculus 40.3.6). (We are indebted to J. W. van Henten for the latter reference.)

³⁸ The distinction received its classic formulation from Plato, who adduces it repeatedly (see esp. *Rep.* 4.430C–431A). On the Stoic formulations, see A. Erskine, *The Hellenistic Stoa: Political Thought and Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990) 43–63 *passim*.

δουλωθέντες] and had eaten defiling food, we would have said that they had been conquered by them [ἐλέγομεν ἂν τοῦτοις αὐτοὺς νενικῆσθαι]” (13:1–2). In the ancient Mediterranean world, “slave” and “woman” were not merely two of the antonyms that served to define the concept “man” (the third antonym being “children,” which could be extended to encompass “youths”).³⁹ “Slave” and “woman” were also variant terms for the internal “other” that posed a perpetual threat to masculine identity. “The enemy was also within,” John J. Winkler writes of this peculiarly brittle concept of masculinity.⁴⁰ A statement such as the following from Plato’s *Laws* thus becomes fully legible: “Being defeated by oneself is the most shameful and at the same time the worst of all defeats” (1.626D–E). Why? Because it is tantamount to a defeat at the hands of women or slaves.⁴¹

In 4 Maccabees it is the paradoxical fate of the absolute monarch, Antiochus, to suffer defeat at the hands of a woman (cf. Judg 4:9; 9:54; Jdt 9:10; 13:15, 17; 14:18; 16:5–6), an old man,⁴² and a handful of boys (“We six boys [μειράκια] have destroyed your tyranny” [11:24]). As such, 4 Maccabees is partly about the (fictitious) public shaming of this traditional villain. But this is simply to say, once again, that 4 Maccabees is in some sense about hegemonic manhood, for manhood was supremely a matter of public perception in the ancient Mediterranean world, of honor versus shame.⁴³ Being forced to dis-

³⁹ See J. Walters, “‘No More Than a Boy’: The Shifting Construction of Masculinity from Ancient Greece to the Middle Ages,” *Gender & History* 5 (1991) 30–31.

⁴⁰ Winkler, *Constraints of Desire*, 49; cf. Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 67.

⁴¹ Cf. Philo’s warning that the mind, which he codes as masculine, can be deceived by the senses, which he codes as feminine. When this happens, “reason is forthwith ensnared and becomes a subject instead of a ruler, a slave instead of a master, an alien instead of a citizen, and a mortal instead of an immortal” (*Op.* 59.165, LCL trans.).

⁴² Specifically, a physically feeble old man (7:13). As M. B. Skinner has noted (“*Ego Mulier*: The Construction of Male Sexuality in Catullus,” *Helios* 20 [1993] 111), physical infirmity due to old age tended to be viewed as a “feminizing” disability in a male:

Male status, the prerogative of the citizen and head of household, is a function of age as well as of sex, hinging upon control—control over wife and children, over slaves, over extrinsic political and economic affairs and, above all, over self. To maintain that status, constant physiological and psychological vigilance is required. Any loss of physical vigor due to old age, infirmity, or overindulgence in carnal pleasures, any analogous lapse of moral resolve, or any diminution of social standing, can weaken the bulwarks of masculinity and cause reversion to a passive “womanish” condition.

Philo’s pronouncement on the “tenth stage” of a man’s life thus acquires added significance: “during the tenth comes the desirable end of life, while the bodily organs are still compact and firm; for prolonged old age is wont to abate and break down the force of each of them” (*Opif.* 103, LCL trans.). So, too, does Sir 3:12–13: “Son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him during his life. Even if his wits desert him, be indulgent; do not dishonor him [μη ἀτιμάσῃς αὐτόν] in all your strength” (our trans.).

⁴³ See D. D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New

honor one's fathers and one's god by eating forbidden food would be shameful enough, Eleazar avers, without giving the oppressor opportunity to laugh derisively (ἐπιγελάω) at one as a result (5:27), thereby compounding the insult to one's manhood. "But you will not have this laugh at my expense [ὅλλ' οὐ γελάσεις κατ' ἐμοῦ τοῦτον τὸν γέλωτα]," he resolves (5:28). He is neither so old nor so "unmanly" (ἄνανδρος) as to allow that to happen (5:30). Although shamefully abused, he refuses to be shamed.⁴⁴ First he is stripped naked, but need not be ashamed, for he is still "adorned with the beauty of his piety [ἐγκοσμούμενον τῇ περὶ τὴν εὐσέβειαν εὐσχημοσύνη]" (6:2). Then he is flogged until he loses control of his body; he falls to the ground but again incurs no loss of honor, for he keeps his reason "erect and unbent [ὀρθὸν εἶχεν καὶ ἀκλινῇ τὸν λογισμὸν]" (6:7).⁴⁵

In the ancient Mediterranean world, μαλακός ("soft"; Latin *mollis*) was the adjective supremely used to differentiate women, girls, boys, youths, effeminate males, catamites, and eunuchs from "true men."⁴⁶ Given that Eleazar has already framed his ordeal as a trial of "manliness," as we saw earlier, it is not surprising that μαλακός now makes its appearance in his discourse, embedded in a compound verb. Urged by his friends to spare himself further abuse by feigning to eat the pork, Eleazar indignantly replies: "Never may we, the children of Abraham, think so ignobly that, being effeminate in spirit [μαλακοψυχή-

Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) 36–38; B. J. Malina and J. H. Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. J. H. Neyrey; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991) 41–43; J. Plevnik, "Honor/Shame," in *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning* (ed. J. J. Pilch and B. J. Malina; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993) 95–97; H. Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. R. Rohrbaugh; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996) 19–40. For an attempt to apply these categories to 4 Maccabees, see D. A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (SBLDS 152; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 127–42; idem, "The Noble Contest: Honor, Shame, and the Rhetorical Strategy of 4 Maccabees," *JSP* 13 (1995) 31–57. Important critiques of some of the pioneering work on honor and shame in the Mediterranean world should, however, be noted. See the comments and bibliography in J. K. Chance, "The Anthropology of Honor and Shame: Culture, Values, and Practice," *Semeia* 68 (1994) 139–52; G. M. Kressel, "An Anthropologist's Response to the Use of Social Science Models in Biblical Studies," *Semeia* 68 (1994) 153–61; deSilva, "Noble Contest," 32–33.

⁴⁴ DeSilva remarks: "The author does not consider for a moment that the tortures and physical outrages to the martyrs' bodies affect their honor in any way. While such treatment is thought to include the destruction of a person's honor and place in society, for the martyrs it is a sign of honor" ("Noble Contest," 54).

⁴⁵ The phrase appears to be a play on ὀρθὸς λόγος ("right reason"), an important Stoic concept (see Erskine, *Hellenistic Stoa*, 16–17, 45).

⁴⁶ Walters is excellent on this ("No More Than a Boy," 29). Cf. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 79; Winkler, *Constraints of Desire*, 50–52; M. W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995) 65, 69; Martin, "Arsenokoitês and Malakos," 124–28, who discusses the meaning of μαλακός in 1 Cor 6:9.

σαντας], we feign a role unbecoming to us" (6:17). To act in so unmanly a fashion would be dishonorable in the extreme:

For it would be irrational if having lived our life in accordance with truth right up to old age and having guarded its reputation [δόξαν] in accordance with law, we should now change course and ourselves become a model of impiety to the young by setting them an example in the eating of unclean food. It would be shameful [αἰσχρόν] if we should survive for only a short time and during it become a laughingstock [καταγελῶμεναι] to all for our cowardice and be despised by the tyrant as unmanly [ἄνδρῳ] for not defending our divine law to the death. (6:18–21)

This sentiment is later echoed by the author in his encomium to Eleazar: *σύ πάτερ τὴν εὐνομίαν ἡμῶν διὰ τῶν ὑπομονῶν εἰς δόξαν ἐκύρωσας* (7:9)—which Hadas aptly, if awkwardly, renders as “You, father, by your perseverance in the public gaze, have made strong our adherence to the Law,” taking his cue from the fact that *δόξα* could mean “public repute.”⁴⁷ To add that it could also mean “honor” would be almost redundant; in the ancient Mediterranean world, male honor and sound reputation were synonymous, and both values were intimately bound up with the dominant concept of masculinity. Antiochus’s reaction to the (too) honorable demise of this “wise and manly” (*σοφὸς καὶ ἀνδρεῖος*, 7:23) sage is to yield to rage, as we already noted: “For when the tyrant had been publicly defeated [*ἐνικλήθη περιφανῶς*] in his first attempt, being unable to compel an old man to eat defiling foods, then in violent rage he commanded that others of the Hebrew captives be brought” (8:2; cf. 9:8). That a gain in honor on the part of one male regularly entailed a loss of honor on the part of another male was a fundamental law of the honor-shame economy, and it appears that Antiochus is only too well aware of this.

But so are the “Hebrew captives” that are now led forth, namely, the seven brothers. Indeed, they seem to believe that any unmanly weakness shown on their part will bring shame not only on themselves but on all their honorable male forebears as well. No sooner has Antiochus finished advising them to eat the forbidden food than they all “with one voice and as with one mind” reject his seductive arguments: “Why do you delay, tyrant? We are ready to die rather than transgress our forefathers’ commandments [*τάς πατριῶν ἐντολάς*]; for we are obviously bringing shame upon our ancestors [*αἰσχυνόμεθα γὰρ τοὺς προγόνους ἡμῶν εἰκότως*] unless we show obedience to the Law and to Moses our counselor” (9:1–2). When four of the brothers have already been butchered, the fifth indignantly asks the tyrant what they have done to be treated in this shameful fashion. “Is it because we revere the Creator of all and live in accord with his virtuous Law? But these things deserve honors, not tortures [*ἀλλὰ ταῦτα τιμῶν*]

⁴⁷ Hadas, *Maccabees*, 185. Anderson concurs that this connotation of *δόξα* is in play here (“4 Maccabees,” 552).

οὐ βασάνων ἐστὶν ἄξια]” (11:5–6). Of course, the frightful tortures do provide the brothers with an invaluable opportunity to prove their incomparable manhood (“You unwittingly bestow glorious favors on us, tyrant” [11:12]) by demonstrating absolute self-mastery over physical pain (ἦσαν αὐτοκράτορες τῶν ἀλγηδόνων [8:28; cf. 13:1]), thereby heaping up unprecedented honor not only for themselves but for their nation (cf. 17:10). And the honor consists both in the unbounded admiration that they win from their fellow men (“For they were a source of wonder, not only to all men [πάντων ἀνθρώπων], but even to their torturers on account of their manly courage [ἀνδρεία] and endurance” [1:11; cf. 17:17, 23–24; 18:3]) and in the approval that they win from their (male) god. Now “they are gathered together in the chorus of their fathers [εἰς πατέρων χορὸν συναγελάζονται]”—together with their manly mother (18:23)—in a heaven become an eternal haven for true men.

II. A Woman “More Manly than Men”

The exemplary self-mastery the boys demonstrate proves them worthy of admiration, emulation, and the designation “men”: “reason retained control over those men [τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐκείνων] in their torture” (14:11; cf. 1:10). But their mother is depicted as yet more manly. Why? Because “even a woman’s mind [καὶ γυναικὸς νοῦς] scorned still more diverse agonies” (14:11; cf. 16:2).

What “agonies” (ἀλγηδόνες) does the author have in mind? For we eventually learn that the mother cheated the torturers: “Some of the guards reported that when she, too, was about to be seized and put to death she cast herself into the fire so that no one might touch her body” (17:1). The answer, apparently, is that the mother vicariously suffered the butchering of each of her boys, thereby enduring the death-torture, not once, but seven times (14:12). “No mother ever loved her children more than the mother of the seven boys,” asserts the author (15:6).⁴⁸ His grisly account of her vicarious torture follows: “She beheld the flesh of her children melting in the fire and their toes and fingers scattered on the ground, and the flesh of their heads right down to the jaws exposed like masks” (15:15)—and so on. The account concludes: “How numerous, then, and how great were the torments that the mother suffered while her sons were tortured on the wheel and with the searing irons” (15:22).

Of course, it is not only with these hideous external pressures that the mother must wrestle; she must also contend with her own internal female

⁴⁸ Stowers notes that the Stoics “showed more interest in children and ‘natural’ familial bonds than did the other Hellenistic schools” (“4 Maccabees,” 931). In overcoming or transforming familial affection, the mother resembles her offspring who mastered their brotherly love (13:19–14:1), a love that might have caused them to sin. Instead they encourage each other to die for the sake of the law. Cf. H.-J. Klauck, “Brotherly Love in Plutarch and in 4 Maccabees,” in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (ed. D. L. Balch, E. Ferguson, and W. A. Meeks; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 144–56.

"nature." The author has already mentioned in passing what he assumes his audience already knows, namely, that "mothers are ἀσθενόψυχοι" (15:5)—"weak-spirited," or "weak-souled," or simply "the weaker sex," as NRSV aptly paraphrases it.⁴⁹ But it is precisely this "innate" disability that the mother is depicted as heroically overcoming, thereby proving herself worthy of one of the more curious compliments that a Hellenistic male author could bestow upon a female character: she shows herself to be a true man at heart. First the author states: "But devout reason, filling her heart with manly courage in the very midst of her emotions [τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτῆς ὁ εὐσεβῆς λογισμὸς ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῖς πάθεσιν ἀνδρειώσας], strengthened her to disregard, for the time being, her parental affection" (15:23).⁵⁰ A few verses later he is prepared to go farther: "O mother of the nation, champion of the law, defender of true religion, and winner of the prize in the contest of the heart! More noble than men in perseverance and more manly than men in endurance [ἀνδρῶν πρὸς ὑπομονὴν ἀνδρειότερα]!" (15:28–30). And again: "By your endurance you have conquered even a tyrant, and by your deeds and words you have been found stronger than a man [καὶ ἔργοις δυνατωτέρα καὶ λόγοις εὐρέθης ἀνδρός]" (16:14). Throughout, the author is embroidering 2 Macc 7:21, which tells how the mother succeeded in "rousing her female reasoning with male courage [τὸν θῆλυον λογισμὸν ἄρσενι θυμῷ διεγείρασα]." ⁵¹

She is stronger than a man, then, and not just any man. For the author of 4 Maccabees dares to imply that the martyr-mother's manly self-control exceeded even that of Daniel and his companion Mishaël (Daniel 3; 6): "Not so savage were the lions surrounding Daniel, nor so blazing hot was the raging fiery furnace of Mishaël, as was the natural mother's love that burned in her when she saw her seven sons tortured in such varied ways. But by means of

⁴⁹ Cf. 16:5: "For this, too, you must consider: If the woman had been fainthearted [δευλόψυχος]—being, as she was, a mother [καίπερ μήτηρ οὔσα]—she would have lamented over them [her sons] and perhaps spoken as follows . . ." This rendering of καίπερ μήτηρ οὔσα is Hadas's. He argues: "It is hard to see the force of the concessive καίπερ ('although') in this context; and none of the suggestions offered by commentators is wholly convincing" (*Maccabees*, 227). 15:5 lends support to his translation.

⁵⁰ Ἀνδρειόω, "fill with (manly) courage," appears to be a neologism; see J. Lust, E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, Vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1992), s.v. ἀνδρειόω.

⁵¹ 2 Macc 6:12–7:42 seems to have functioned as the primary source for 4 Maccabees, the latter being a free expansion of the former. So Dupont-Sommer (*Quatrième Livre*, 26–32), Hadas (*Maccabees*, 92–95), and most subsequent commentators, *pace* J. Freudenthal (*Die Flavius Josephus beigelegte Schrift über die Herrschaft der Vernunft [IV Makkabäerbuch], eine Predigt aus dem ersten nachchristlichen Jahrhundert* [Breslau: Schletter, 1869] 72–90), followed by A. Deissmann ("Das vierte Makkabäerbuch," in *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments* [ed. L. Kautzsch; Tübingen, 1900] 2.156), who argued that the authors of 2 and 4 Maccabees each had independent recourse to the (lost) five-volume work of Jason of Cyrene upon which 2 Maccabees purports to be based (2:23).

devout reason the mother quenched these many intense emotions" (16:3–4). Indeed, the martyr-mother with the "mind of adamant" (ὥπερ ἀδαμάντινον ἔχουσα τὸν νοῦν [16:13]) begs comparison with no less a figure than Abraham himself. Far from being "weak-souled" (ἀσθενόψυχος, 15:5) or "timid-souled" (δειλόψυχος, 16:5), she possesses a soul like the father of her people: "But sympathy for her children did not sway the mother of the youths, whose soul was like Abraham's [τὴν Ἀβραάμ ὁμόψυχον τῶν νεανίσκων μητέρα]" (14:20). For her spectacular sacrifice of her sons in obedience to the divine will calls to mind and rivals Abraham's own (near) sacrifice of *his* son: "as the daughter of God-fearing Abraham, she remembered his fortitude" (15:28; cf. 13:12; 16:20).⁵² *Lamentations Rabbah* (fifth or sixth century CE), which features a rather different performance of this martyrological tale, will go farther than our author dares, having the mother say to her youngest boy as he is about to be slaughtered, "My son, go to the patriarch Abraham and tell him, 'Thus said my mother, "Do not preen yourself [on your righteousness], saying I built an altar and offered up my son, Isaac." Behold, our mother built seven altars and offered up seven sons in one day. Yours was only a test, but mine was in earnest'" (1.50).⁵³

The martyr mother may exhibit a masculinity equal to or greater than that of any man, but in doing so she is not unique. The literary and philosophical topos of the subject who is anatomically female but morally masculine is an exceptionally far-flung one, found in early Christian texts, and even in early Buddhist texts, as well as in ancient Jewish texts and pagan Greek and Roman texts.⁵⁴ Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, for example, depicts Socrates recounting his conversation with a wealthy landowner, Ischomachus, in which the latter boasts of the prodigious progress in virtue exhibited by his precocious young wife as a result of his having deigned to instruct her in the proper management of her household. "By Hera, Ischomachus," exclaims Socrates, "you show that your wife has a masculine intelligence [ἀνδρικήν γε ἐπιδεικνύεις τὴν διάνοιαν τῆς γυναικός]" (10.1).⁵⁵ Philo of Alexandria, for his part, extols the soul that suc-

⁵² See further Young, "Soul of Abraham," esp. 77, 79–80. On the figure of Abraham generally in 4 Maccabees, see S. Sandmel, *Philo's Place in Judaism: A Study of Conceptions of Abraham in Jewish Literature* (New York: Ktav, 1971) 56–59.

⁵³ A. Cohen's translation (*Midrash Rabbah*, ed. H. Freedman and M. Simon; Vol. 7, *Deuteronomy and Lamentations*, trans. J. Rabinowitz and A. Cohen [London: Soncino Press, 1939]). The story is quoted in full by Hadas (*Maccabees*, 129–33). More on the rabbinic versions below.

⁵⁴ For the Buddhist texts, see D. M. Paul, *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in the Mahayana Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1979) 171–74; N. Schuster, "Changing the Female Body: Wise Women and the Bodhisattva Career in Some *Maharatnakuta-sutras*," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 4 (1981) 24–69.

⁵⁵ Earlier the wife had revealed: "My mother told me that my duty is to practise self-control [εἶναι σωφρονεῖν]." "By Zeus, wife," replies Ischomachus, "my father said the same to me" (7.14–15; cf. 7.26). (Pomeroy's translation [see n. 12 above].) Building on the *Oeconomicus*, S.

ceeds in bringing together masculine and feminine elements—"not that the masculine thoughts may be made womanish, and relaxed by softness," he hastily adds, "but that the female element, the senses, may be made manly by following masculine thoughts and by receiving from them seed for procreation, that it may perceive [things] with wisdom, prudence, justice, and courage, in sum, with virtue" (*Quaest. in Gn.* 2.49; cf. 2.12).⁵⁶ Then, too, there is the now notorious saying with which the *Gospel of Thomas* ends. In response to Simon Peter urging his fellow male disciples, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life," Jesus defends her by declaring, "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven" (114).⁵⁷ As a final example consider the climactic vision vouchsafed to the Christian martyr Perpetua, according to the "prison diary" contained in the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*. In the vision Perpetua is led into the arena to confront her opponent, an Egyptian "of vicious appearance." "My clothes were stripped off," she reports, "and suddenly I was a man [Greek ἐγὲν-νήθην ἄρρην; Latin *facta sum masculus*]" (10). Unencumbered by her femaleness she succeeds in overcoming her opponent, as a symbolic prelude to her overcoming of fear in the real arena and her stalwart acceptance of death.⁵⁸

Murnaghan has shown how the cultural categories of masculinity and femininity could refer in classical Greek literature, not to conditions based ultimately upon anatomy so much as to degrees of self-mastery (σωφροσύνη) in persons of either sex ("How a Woman Can Be More Like a Man: The Dialogue between Ischomachus and His Wife in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*," *Helios* 15 [1988] 9–22).

⁵⁶ LCL translation. Elsewhere Philo states: "For progress [toward virtue] is indeed nothing else than the giving up of the female gender by changing into the male, since the female gender is material, passive, corporeal, and sense-perceptible, while the male is active, rational, incorporeal, and more akin to mind and thought" (*Quaest. in Ex.* 1.8, LCL; cf. *Det.* 28; *Leg.* 319). See further R. A. Baer, Jr., *Philo's Use of the Categories of Male and Female* (ALGHJ 3; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 45–49; K. Aspegren, *The Male Woman: A Feminine Ideal in the Early Church* (ed. René Kieffer; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990) 93–95; S. L. Mattila, "Wisdom, Sense Perception, Nature, and Philo's Gender Gradient," *HTR* 89 (1996) 103–29.

⁵⁷ T. O. Lambdin's translation (*The Nag Hammadi Library in English* [ed. J. M. Robinson; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988]). See further M. W. Meyer, "Making Mary Male: The Categories of 'Male' and 'Female' in the Gospel of Thomas," *NTS* 31 (1985) 554–70; E. A. Castelli, "'I Will Make Mary Male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity," in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (ed. J. Epstein and K. Straub; New York: Routledge, 1991) esp. 29–33.

⁵⁸ Castelli treats this metamorphosis in some detail ("Make Mary Male," 33–43), as does Aspegren (*Male Woman*, 133–39, 142–43). See also P. C. Miller, "The Devil's Gateway: An Eros of Difference in the Dreams of Perpetua," *Dreaming* 2 (1992) 60–61; M. A. Tilley, "The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity," in *Searching the Scriptures*, Vol. 2, *A Feminist Commentary* (ed. E. Schüssler Fiorenza; New York: Crossroad, 1994) 844–45. Similar examples could be multiplied; see Aspegren, *Male Woman*, 99–164 passim; also K. Vogt, "'Becoming Male': A Gnostic and Early Christian Metaphor," in Borresen, ed., *The Image of God*, 170–86 passim.

What these different examples, embedded in different texts, genres, and cultural contexts, seem to share in common is a separation of masculinity from a simply matter of anatomy, coupled with a conception of masculinity as the measure of virtue. Notwithstanding the fact that one of our examples appears to have been authored by a woman (Perpetua's prison diary is generally accepted as authentic), the topos denigrates women's biology and constructs female gender negatively. Kerstin Aspegren puts it succinctly: "If a woman achieved something good or distinguished herself in ethical, religious or intellectual matters, she was not praised as being a woman of good qualities but as a woman who had become manly."⁵⁹ (A merciless double standard prevailed, moreover: a man who had become womanly was regarded as a moral degenerate, as someone who deserved to be mastered by a real man.⁶⁰) Unable to measure up to men in the arena of virtue, the best a woman could hope for was to be declared an honorary man. This is the laurel wreath that Perpetua awards to herself in her prison diary, the same wreath that is awarded to the martyr-mother in 4 Maccabees (17:11–16; 18:23). But even this recuperating gesture could arouse anxiety in certain male spectators, as we are about to see.

The mother is given the last word, or rather the last speech, in 4 Maccabees. But a strange speech it turns out to be:

The mother of the seven children also addressed these precepts to her offspring: "I was a chaste virgin and did not venture outside my father's house; but I kept guard over the rib that was fashioned [into the female body]. No seducer in the desert or corruptor in the field defiled me, nor did the destroying and deceitful serpent sully the purity of my virginity. In the days of my prime I remained with my husband. . . . While he was still with you, he taught you the law and the prophets. He read to you of Abel, slain by Cain, of Isaac, offered as a burnt offering, and of Joseph, in prison. He told you of the zeal of Phineas, and taught you about Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael in the fire. He also sang the praises of Daniel in the lions' den and called him blessed. He reminded you of the scripture of Isaiah which says, 'Even though you pass through fire the flame shall not burn you.' He sang to you the psalm of David which says, 'Many are the afflictions of the righteous'. . . . He affirmed the question of Ezekiel, 'Shall these dry bones live?' For he did not forget to teach you the song that Moses taught, which says, 'I kill and I make alive.'" (18:6–19)

⁵⁹ Aspegren, *Male Woman*, 11.

⁶⁰ See Winkler, *Constraints of Desire*, 45–70 passim; Gleason, *Making Men*, 60–76; D. Sly, *Philo's Perception of Women* (BJS 209; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) 211–12. The labeling of a male opponent as feminine, therefore, was a stock polemical slur; see R. S. Kraemer, "The Other as Woman: An Aspect of Polemic among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World," in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Cultural Identity* (ed. L. Silberman and R. Cohn; New York: New York University Press, 1994) 121–44.

Critical commentators have long noted the tacked-on appearance of this speech—it reads like an addendum—and some have not hesitated to brand it an interpolation (Freudenthal, for example, followed most notably by Dupont-Sommer), or at least a displacement (Deissmann suggested that it was originally a continuation of 16:23).⁶¹ Hadas, writing in the early 1950s, confessed himself to be enchanted by the cosy images that the speech summons up: “Whether or not the passage is genuine, it presents a charming picture of domestic piety: the strict chastity of the maiden, the devotion of the wife to her husband, the love of children, the father reading Scripture to the family and instructing them in religion.”⁶²

Of course, the scene is not nearly so innocent. Today it is hard to avoid the suspicion that we are witnessing not just a domestic scene but also a scene of domestication, that the martyr-mother is being tamed and herded into the patriarchal fold. In some respects she has not been allowed to stray too far from the fold to begin with. Robin Darling Young notes that in 2 Maccabees 7 the woman is never once permitted to speak publicly; her remarks are confined to private exhortations to her sons in “the paternal tongue [τῇ πατρὶῳ φωνῇ]” (7:21, 27), of which Antiochus is ignorant.⁶³ Similarly in 4 Maccabees, the woman is allowed to encourage all seven of her sons privately (12:7; 16:15–25), yet of the nine main martyrs in the book (counting Eleazar), she is the only one who does not address Antiochus and his men directly.

Contrast *Lamentations Rabbah* 1.50, the fullest rabbinic parallel to 2 Maccabees 7 and 4 Maccabees 8–18 (the story of the mother and the seven sons),⁶⁴ which unequivocally presents the woman as the central character from the outset (“It is related of Miriam, the daughter of Tanhum, that she was taken captive with her seven sons . . .”), and later has her not only address the tyrant directly, but shame him by insulting him to his face.⁶⁵ The youngest son has just

⁶¹ See Freudenthal, *IV Makkabäerbuch*, 155; Dupont-Sommer, *Quatrième Livre*, 153; Deissmann, “Das vierte Makkabäerbuch,” 175. R. B. Townshend is content to label it a “digression” (“The Fourth Book of Maccabees,” *APOT* 2.655). The debate hinges on the style of the passage as well as its content. Freudenthal deemed the style inferior to the rest of the book (*IV Makkabäerbuch*, 155); Deissmann disagreed. More recently Stowers (“4 Maccabees,” 933–34), and especially Breitenstein (*Beobachtungen*, 155–56), have declared the speech genuine, the latter in the course of a detailed stylistic analysis of the book.

⁶² Hadas, *Maccabees*, 239.

⁶³ Young, “Soul of Abraham,” 70. The language is probably best understood as Hebrew (rather than Aramaic), which is how the author of 4 Maccabees interprets it (12:7). Cf. Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 297–98. See also Young’s comments on 18:6–19 (“Soul of Abraham,” 78–79).

⁶⁴ The other parallels are *b. Git.* 57b; *S. Eliyahu Rab.* 30; *Pesiq. R.* 43.

⁶⁵ Nameless in 4 Maccabees, the mother is dubbed Miriam bat Tanhum, or Hannah, in the rabbinic tradition, Solomone in the Greek Christian tradition, and Mart Simouni in the Syriac tradition (see further Young, “Soul of Abraham,” 67). The tyrant in the rabbinic versions, however, is not Antiochus Epiphanes but Hadrian: “Hadrian came and seized upon a widow” (*S. Eliyahu Rab.* 30); “In the days of the *shemad* [the Hadrianic persecutions]” (*Pesiq. R.* 43). The disparate versions

had a lively debate with the tyrant, which has afforded him ample opportunity to parade his encyclopedic knowledge of scripture—notwithstanding the fact that he is only two-and-a-half years old. Unimpressed, the tyrant orders him slain. At this point Miriam intervenes:

“By the life of your head, O emperor, give me my son that I may embrace and kiss him.” They gave him to her, and she bared her breasts and suckled him. She said to the king, “By the life of your head, O emperor, put me to death first and then slay him.” He answered her, “I cannot agree to that, because it is written in your Torah, *And whether it be cow or ewe, ye shall not kill it and its young both in one day*” (Lev. 22.28). She retorted, “You unutterable fool! Have you already fulfilled all the commandments save only this one?” He immediately ordered him to be slain.⁶⁶

The mother in 2 Maccabees 7, although a far cry from Miriam bat Tanhum, does cause Antiochus to suspect that he is being treated with contempt. He is unable to understand her address to her sons, yet his suspicions are aroused by her reproachful tone (ὁ δὲ Ἀντίοχος οἰόμενος καταφρονεῖσθαι καὶ τὴν ὀνειδίζουσιν ὑπορώμενος φωνὴν . . . [7:24]). The author of 4 Maccabees eliminates this detail; in his version, the woman is not said to offer any affront to the monarch. Like a respectable Greco-Roman matron, she is seen but not (over)heard.⁶⁷ One suspects, nevertheless, either that the author of 4 Maccabees has had second thoughts, fearing that he has painted too masculine a portrait of his heroine, one that risks alienating his elite male readership,⁶⁸ and

of the story found in the Maccabean literature, on the one hand, and in the rabbinic literature, on the other, are best viewed as variant performances of a popular martyrological tale. Various scholars have argued that the tale has a firm historical foundation (e.g., Hadas, *Maccabees*, 128; Dupont-Sommer, *Quatrième Livre*, 24, cf. 20–25; Young, “Soul of Abraham,” 68). This position is probably insufficiently critical, however. J. J. Collins contends that the “legendary character” of 2 Maccabees 7 (and, by extension, 4 Maccabees 8–18) is suggested not only by “the highly implausible presence of the king” (influenced, perhaps, by Daniel 3 and 5), “but also by the stock number of seven sons. There are numerous stories about seven sons even within ancient Judaism [e.g., *T. Mos.* 9; Josephus, *Ant.* 14.15.5]. . . . Seven is the number of perfection, and seven sons is the proverbially perfect family” (*Daniel, First Maccabees, Second Maccabees with an Excursus on the Apocalyptic Genre* [Old Testament Message 16; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1981] 310).

⁶⁶ Cohen’s translation (see n. 53 above).

⁶⁷ Nor is she seen overmuch. 4 Macc 18:7 (“I was a chaste virgin and did not venture outside my father’s house”) is perhaps intended to suggest that she would virtuously have preferred to avoid the public gaze altogether. Pliny the Younger, a contemporary or near-contemporary of our author, praises his wife for sitting demurely behind a curtain when he gives a public reading of his work, so that she may hear without being seen (*Ep.* 4.19). Cf. Plutarch, *Mor.* 139C; 1 Cor 14:34–35; 1 Tim 2:11–12. In general, however, the exclusion of model women from the public gaze may have represented a male desideratum more than actual practice.

⁶⁸ Stowers suggests that the author of 4 Maccabees writes from the perspective of the male ruling elite of his ethnic subculture (*Romans*, 60). If so, he would likely have seen himself as primarily addressing male peers who shared his social location (see Klauck, *4 Makkabäerbuch*, 665).

that he is hurrying to tone it down in 18:6–19; or, alternatively, that a later editor has undertaken to soften it for him.⁶⁹ Whoever the author of the speech may be, its effect is the same. The “manly” woman is effectively, if clumsily, “feminized”; a share of the credit for the manliness of the sons is transferred from her to their father, and she is depicted as always having been properly subservient to him. Though she has shown that she can take it like a man, she remains a woman in the end.

III. Concluding Reflections

Mastery is synonymous with masculinity in most of the Greek and Latin texts that survive from antiquity. Such mastery could be directed outward as domination of others or inward as domination of oneself. Mastery of others was frequently justified on the basis of the master's superior masculine reason and self-control. In 4 Maccabees, absolute control of the physical circumstances of others, epitomized by the Gentile despot, is radically devalued in favor of absolute self-control, epitomized by the Jewish martyrs. The book presents a female, an aged male, and a handful of boys—all representatives of a conquered people—as ironic exemplars of masculinity at the expense of an ostensibly powerful male in the prime of life. The martyrs themselves become icons of power in the process—of masculine power redefined as an affair of the will, which need have no recourse to force, a definition clearly consonant with the political circumstances of the subcultural group to which the book is addressed. The “weak” defeat the “strong,” and self-mastery displaces political mastery of others as a defining male trait. 4 Maccabees constructs a Hellenistic Jewish version of masculinity supportive of those who suffer Gentile domination, yet in continuity with Hellenistic tradition—and herein lies the problem.

Victory is achieved in 4 Maccabees only by accepting and reaffirming the dominant hierarchical continuum along which ruler and ruled, master and slave, male and female were positioned. The physically feeble old man, the boys, and especially the woman gain all the more stature from the fact that their masculine reason and courage are exhibited by those who might be expected to be among the mastered. Antiochus is feminized, his apparent mastery called severely into question because of his inferior level of self-control. But although Eleazar, the boys, and their mother emerge as the true men in the end, the con-

⁶⁹ Here it may be instructive to note the objections that Musonius Rufus anticipates to his argument that women should be allowed to study philosophy: “Yes, but I assure you, some will say, that women who associate with philosophers are bound to be arrogant [αὐθάδεις] for the most part and presumptuous [θρασεῖας], in that abandoning their own households and turning to the company of men they practice speeches, talk like sophists, and analyze syllogisms, when they ought to be sitting at home spinning [δέον οἶκοι καθημένους τάλαισουργεῖν]” (Discourse III, translated by C. E. Lutz, “Musonius Rufus ‘The Roman Socrates,’” in *Yale Classical Studies*, Vol. 10 [ed. A. R. Bellinger; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947] 42–43).

nection between masculinity and domination is not overturned or seriously challenged in this book.

4 Maccabees does modify the elite, hegemonic concept of masculinity by elevating self-mastery over mastery of social inferiors. Yet the martyrs master Antiochus in effect, so that mastery of others is still central and still celebrated. The irony of 4 Maccabees is that a feeble, flabby old man, a gaggle of boys, and an elderly widow—all persons who should rate low on the hierarchical continuum of (masterful) masculinity and (mastered) femininity—triumph over someone who should be at the privileged end of the continuum. The continuum must still exist or the irony could not exist. And the continuum still has masculinity at its superior end and femininity at its inferior end. That the continuum is employed rather than destroyed in this text is especially apparent in the treatment of the martyr-mother. The tacked-on speech of 18:6–19 returns the woman to her proper place on the continuum in relation to her husband. She may be more masculine than a Gentile tyrant, but not unfeminine in relation to her Jewish husband. She may have mastered the tyrant, but her own master is her husband. Consequently, she rates higher on the continuum than Antiochus, but lower than her husband. Masculinity in 4 Maccabees is both a process and a product; it is a moral state achieved and maintained through a sheer act of will (subjugation of the passions), and as such is independent of anatomy. Yet women are also predestined (by anatomy?) in 4 Maccabees to be subservient to men. The victory over oppression that 4 Maccabees celebrates is therefore double-edged. On the one hand, the oppressed have triumphed; on the other, they have been implicated in a contest of manhood that is itself inherently oppressive.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ The authors would like to thank Loveday Alexander for a valuable critique of an earlier draft of this article. They would also like to thank the American Council of Learned Societies and the University of Idaho for travel grants that enabled Anderson to attend the SBL International Meeting in Dublin in July 1996 to present with Moore a paper that included portions of an earlier version of this article.



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“They Abused Him Like a Woman”: Homoeroticism, Gender Blurring, and the Rabbis in Late Antiquity

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WITHIN THE GROWING scholarship on constructions of sexuality in Western antiquity, one conclusion consistently comes to the fore: for male citizens in ancient Greece and Rome, sex was constructed as bipolar, emphasizing the categories of penetrator and partner who is penetrated.¹ Penetration, which was conceptually linked to status and political power, was the domain of the adult male. The partner penetrated, ideally, was a person of lesser political status, whether a woman,

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¹This view of ancient sexuality as bipolar was advanced by Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London, 1978), and more theoretically by Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1986). The idea is further developed in David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York, 1990), pp. 15–71; John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire* (New York, 1990), pp. 3–4, 50; Amy Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor*, rev. ed. (New York, 1992), pp. xii–xxxiii, 81–143, 287–90. See also John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 61–87; Maud W. Gleason, “The Semiotics of Gender: Physiognomy and Self-fashioning in the Second Century, C.E.,” in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton, NJ, 1990), pp. 389–415. Through much of this article I will enter into an implicit dialogue with these authors and the suggestions that they make for ancient sexuality. Is the rabbinic evidence consistent with their conclusions? I respond directly to this issue in the conclusion.

a slave (male or female), or a boy.² Two types of sexual partners fell outside this schema and thus were often the subject of withering societal criticism by Greek, Roman, and Christian authors: the adult male who allowed himself to be sexually penetrated and the female who sexually penetrated. Both were anomalies, people who violated both the political and gender hierarchies of their societies.

This commonly accepted reconstruction of ancient sexuality and homoeroticism assumes a very strong political hierarchy, in which the adult citizen males—who, with very few exceptions, are also the authors of the surviving literary texts from antiquity—hold virtually absolute political power. To penetrate was to reaffirm, perhaps even assert, this power. To be penetrated was perceived as being as women were perceived, that is, weak and dominated.³ The adult male citizen who allowed himself to be sexually penetrated, especially in Roman society, was looked upon with loathing.⁴ Female-female sexual relations were imagined as involving a female who was a sexual penetrator, that is, a woman who rebelled against her political place within the society.⁵

But what of the Jews, a people who were deeply influenced by both

²For a critique of recent studies that emphasize Foucault's ideas on the relationship between power and sexuality, see Bruce Thornton, "Constructionism and Ancient Greek Sex," *Helios* 18 (1991): 181–93. See also John Boswell, "Concepts, Experience, and Sexuality," *Differences* 2 (1990): 67–87, especially p. 72; Amy Richlin, "Zeus and Metis: Foucault, Feminism, Classics," *Helios* 18 (1991): 160–80.

³See, Aeschines *In Tim.* 113, 126; Musonius Rufus 12.3 (Cora Lutz, "Musonius Rufus: 'The Roman Socrates,'" *Yale Classical Studies* 10 [1947]: 86–87); Juvenal 2.54–56. Abbreviations for classical sources can be found at the beginning of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Unless otherwise noted, all classical texts can be found in the *Loeb Classical Library* series. The pathic was also legally penalized in Rome (although some early—and, more clearly, later—laws in Rome also dealt with the man who penetrated other males). See Elaine Fantham, "Stuprum: Public Attitudes and Penalties for Sexual Offenses in Republican Rome," *Echos du Monde Classique/Classical Views* 35 n.s. 10 (1991): 267–91; Boswell, *Christianity*, pp. 70–71; Saara Lilja, *Homosexuality in Republican and Augustan Rome*, *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum*, no. 74 (Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, 1983), pp. 112–121; Amy Richlin, "Not Before Homosexuality: The Materiality of the *Cinaedus* and the Roman Law against Love between Men," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3 (1993): 569–71. Cf. Hans Ankum, "La *captiva adultera*: Problèmes concernant l'*acusatio adulterii* en droit romain classique," *Revue internationale des droits de l'antiquité*, 3d ser., 32 (1985): 154, n. 4. On the Roman "cult of virility," see Paul Veyne, "Homosexuality in Ancient Rome," in *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, ed. Philippe Ariès and André Béjin (New York, 1985), p. 27.

⁴See, for examples, Cicero *De Or.* 2.277; *Cat.* 2.22–24; Quintilian *Inst.* 5.9.14; Martial 10.65. See further Richlin, *Garden of Priapus*, pp. 220–26, 287–90; Richlin, "Not Before Homosexuality," pp. 532–54; Ramsay MacMullen, "Roman Attitudes to Greek Love," *Historia* 31 (1982): 484–502; Lilja, pp. 122–27.

⁵On female homoeroticism, see Seneca *Contrav.* 1.2.23; *Phaed.* 4.15–16; *Ep.* 95.20.2; Ovid *Met.* 9.666ff; Lucian *Dial. Meret.* 5 (289–92); Martial 1.90, 7.67, 7.70. The use of

Hellenism and Roman culture and law and yet were also a politically subjugated people, who swore allegiance to God's law as revealed in the Hebrew Bible?⁶ How did the rabbis of Roman Palestine understand homoeroticism?⁷ Although the rabbis, like the extant Greek and Roman authors, were part of an exclusively male elite, they appear to have wielded very little real political power.⁸ Also, unlike their non-Jewish

the term *tribades*, which derives from the Greek word meaning "rub," usually denotes a penetrating female. For discussions of female homoeroticism in Roman antiquity, see Judith P. Hallett, "Female Homoeroticism and the Denial of Roman Reality in Latin Literature," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 3 (1989/90): 209–27, especially pp. 209–10; Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World* (New Haven, 1992), pp. 164–71; Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia, 1987), pp. 140–44; Bernadette J. Broton, "Paul's View on the Nature of Women and Female Homoeroticism," in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, ed. Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan, and Margaret R. Miles (Boston, 1985), pp. 65–70.

⁶On Greek and Roman influence on the Jews, see, for example, Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia, 1974); Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1942), and *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1950); David Daube, "Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 22 (1949): 239–64; Boaz Cohen, *Jewish and Roman Law*, 2 vols. (New York, 1966). The state of the field is summarized in Sandra R. Shimoff, "Hellenization among the Rabbis: Some Evidence from Early Aggadot concerning David and Solomon," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18 (1987): 168–73.

⁷The standing studies on rabbinic, and Jewish, constructions of homoeroticism are deficient: most are either outdated or polemical, attempting to justify their positions within the current debate on the acceptance of homosexuality within Judaism. The many recent studies of homoeroticism in Greek, Roman, and Christian society usually only make passing reference to the "Jewish view" of homosexuality. See, for example, John Boswell, *Christianity*, pp. 26, n. 48 and 101, nn. 32, 34. For examples of scholarship on this topic, see Louis Epstein, *Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism* (Cambridge, MA, 1948), pp. 134–38 (grouped under the subtitle, "Sex Perversions"); Immanuel Jakobovits, s. v. "Homosexuality," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971), vol. 8, cols. 961–62; Samuel Dresner, "Homosexuality and the Order of Creation," *Judaism* 40 (1991): 309–21; William Orbach, "Homosexuality and Jewish Law," *Journal of Family Law* 14 (1975): 353–81; Gershon Frankfurter and Rivka Ulmer, "Eine Anfrage über Homosexualität im jüdischen Gesetz," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 43 (1991): 49–56. See also the sources in Tom Horner, *Homosexuality and the Judeo-Christian Tradition: An Annotated Bibliography* (Metuchen, NJ, 1981).

⁸Space does not permit a full review of recent advances in this area. Archaeological evidence shows that the picture presented in rabbinic literature of rabbinic involvement in the synagogue did not mirror the reality. See Erwin Randall Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, 13 vols. (New York, 1953–68), especially vol. 12, and the abridgment by Jacob Neusner, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Princeton, NJ, 1988); Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Epigraphical Rabbis," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 72 (1981): 1–17; Lee I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* (New York, 1989). Levine argues that rabbinic authority over Jewish communities in Roman Palestine increased in the late third century, but even if he is correct there is

counterparts, the rabbis considered the Hebrew Bible as authoritative, and about male homoeroticism the Hebrew Bible, as we shall see, was quite explicit (if not entirely clear). Despite these differences, the rabbis of Roman Palestine, I argue, shared similar assumptions and values about male sexual passivity with contemporary Greek and Roman authors. The rhetoric through which these values were transmitted, as well as assumptions about homoeroticism generally, however, often differed markedly. Ultimately, the rabbis rooted their own understanding of all homoeroticism in assumptions about sanctioned gender roles. While the bulk of their own discussion centers on male homoeroticism, their few comments on female homoeroticism and on the *androgynos* (hermaphrodite) support this conclusion.⁹

JEWISH PRECEDENTS

The rabbis were essentially conservative: they assigned great (although not absolute) import to the texts and traditions that preceded them. It is

no evidence that the rabbis wielded authority over even a significant minority of the Jewish population. On the rabbinic (in)ability to impose corporeal punishment, see Origen *Ep. ad Africanus* 14 (PG 11:41); *b. Git.* 67b; *b. B. Qam.* 59a–b. See, further, Isaiah M. Gafni, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era* (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 99–100 (in Hebrew).

⁹A few methodological comments may be in order. Rabbinic documents, by and large, are compilations of dicta often attributed to rabbis who lived well before the final redaction of the documents. These rabbis traditionally are divided into two groups: the “tannaim,” who lived in and before the early third century C.E.; and the “amoraim,” who lived from the mid-third to sixth centuries C.E. The historical verity of these attributions, as well as the historical reliability of the information contained in these dicta, is currently under debate. For purposes of this essay, it is not important to ascertain whether a particular rabbi uttered a particular statement. What is important is whether sources attributed to Palestinian rabbis in the Babylonian Talmud, which was redacted around the fifth or sixth centuries C.E. in Babylon, are reliably Palestinian. Current studies and my own research, which shows a coherency of thought and assumptions throughout dicta attributed to Palestinians, suggest that at least the *geographical* attribution, and perhaps even the chronological, may be trusted. All the material presented here is from documents either redacted in Palestine or attributed to Palestinians in the Babylonian Talmud. In only one instance in this article is a chronological argument necessary. Generally, my dating of rabbinic documents follows Hermann L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. Markus Bockmuehl (Minneapolis, 1992). Rabbinic chronology follows the suggestions of Ḥanoch Albeck, *Ma'vo l'Talmudim* (1969; rpt. Tel Aviv, 1987) (in Hebrew). Unless otherwise noted, my use of the term “rabbis” or “rabbinic” always refers to Palestinian, not Babylonian, rabbis. For some of the source-critical and historical issues involved, see David Halivni, *Sources and Traditions: A Source Critical Commentary on the Talmud, Tractate Shabbath* (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 5–27 (in Hebrew), and “Contemporary Methods of the Study of Talmud,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979): 192–201; Shamma Friedman, *A Critical Study of “Yevamot X” with a Methodological Introduction* (Jerusalem, 1978) (in

worthwhile to discuss briefly some of these texts on and attitudes toward homoeroticism that the rabbis may have inherited.

Despite some claims to the contrary, the Hebrew Bible has only two explicit references to homoeroticism.¹⁰ Both are dicta contained within legal codes that discuss sexual conduct: "Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence [*to'evah*]" (Lev. 18:22); "If a man lies with a male as one lies with a woman, the two of them have done an abhorrent thing [*to'evah*]; they shall be put to death—their bloodguilt is upon them" (Lev. 20:13). Lev. 18:22 prohibits a man, apparently, from anal intercourse with another man. The sexual codes of Leviticus 18 and 20 are generally parallel, with the latter often specifying the death penalty for violation of these sexual mores, as is done for male homoeroticism.

The meaning of the term *to'evah* in this context is obscure. Although

Hebrew); Jacob Neusner, ed., *The Formation of the Babylonian Talmud* (Leiden, 1970); Jacob Neusner, *The Bavli's Massive Miscellanies: The Problem of Agglutinative Discourse in the Talmud of Babylonia* (Atlanta, GA, 1992), and *Sources and Traditions: Types of Composition in the Talmud of Babylonia* (Atlanta, GA, 1992), and *The Principal Parts of the Bavli's Discourse: A Preliminary Taxonomy* (Atlanta, GA, 1992); Richard Kalmin, "Quotation Forms in the Babylonian Talmud: Authentically Amoraic, or a Later Editorial Construct?" *Hebrew Union College Annual* 59 (1988): 167–87. For some comments on rabbinic historiography, see Shamma Friedman, "Literary Development and Historicity in the Aggadic Narrative of the Babylonian Talmud—A Study Based upon B.M. 83b–86a," in *Community and Culture: Essays in Jewish Studies in Honor of the Ninetieth Anniversary of the Founding of Gratz College*, ed. Nahum M. Waldman (Philadelphia, 1987), pp. 67–80; and the bibliographical appendix in Richard Kalmin, "Saints or Sinners, Scholars or Ignoramuses? Stories about the Rabbis as Evidence for the Composite Nature of the Babylonian Talmud," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 15 (1990): 203–5.

¹⁰In his commentary on Lev. 18:22, Baruch Levine asserts that "male homosexuality is associated with the ancient Canaanites," citing for proof the stories of Sodom (Gen. 19) and of the concubine at Gibeah (Judg. 19) (Baruch Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* [Philadelphia, 1989], p. 123). Although these stories probably do allude to male homoeroticism, it is far from the main concern of either story (although the allusion is hard to deny, as does Derrick Sherwin Bailey, in *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* [London, 1955], pp. 2–6). Judg. 19 is patterned on Gen. 19: they can hardly be used as independent witnesses to an association between Canaanites and male homoeroticism. See Charles F. Burney, *The Book of Judges* (New York, 1970), pp. 443–45; Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (Sheffield, 1988), pp. 165–74. Levine also links male temple prostitutes, *kedeshim* (Deut. 23:18–19), to male homoeroticism. This does not appear to be its meaning in the Hebrew Bible, although, as I show below, that is how the rabbis interpret it. See Samuel E. Loewenstamm, s.v. "*Kedesh*," *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Jerusalem, 1964–88), 7: 35–36 (in Hebrew); Elaine Adler Goodfriend, s.v. "Prostitution (OT)," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York, 1992), 5:507–9. Note that other biblical legal codes that discuss sexuality (for example, Deut. 22:13–23:1; Ezek. 22:9–10) omit any reference to homoeroticism. Tom Horner's assertion that the story of David and Jonathan refers to homoeroticism is unsubstantiated. See Tom Horner, *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times* (Philadelphia, 1978), pp. 26–39.

the term is used in the Hebrew Bible to denote sexual irregularities, it is more frequently employed to refer to idolatry and moral failures, and occasionally to other violations of ritual practices.¹¹ In this context, use of the term does not appear to denote exceptional opprobrium.

The Hebrew Bible forbids anal intercourse between men and imposes the death penalty on those who commit such an activity.¹² Beyond that, almost nothing can be said of any biblical “view” of homoeroticism.¹³

Jewish authors writing in Greek during the Hellenistic and Roman periods vigorously condemn homoeroticism. Most frequently, these authors argue that anal intercourse between men is “against nature.” The clearest example can be found in Pseudo-Phocylides, most likely a Jew writing in Alexandria sometime between 30 B.C.E. and 40 C.E.:¹⁴

Transgress not for unlawful sex the natural limits of sexuality.

For even animals are not pleased by intercourse of male with male.

And let not women imitate the sexual role of men.¹⁵

Nature (*φύσις*) limits sexual expression, and in the case of male homoeroticism, shows its law clearly among the animals. Women, for reasons not stated explicitly (although probably connected to the argument from nature), are told to shun the active sexual role.

¹¹Sexual irregularities: Lev. 18:26 (a wide range of sexual conduct); Deut. 24:4 (a man taking back a woman whom he divorced and who was subsequently married to another man); 1 Kgs. 14:24 (perhaps referring to ritual prostitution); Ezek. 16:22 (general sexual misconduct), 47, 51, 58 (female sexual misconduct), 22:11, 23:36 (adultery), 33:26 (probably adultery). Idolatry: Deut. 12:31, 13:14–15, 17:4, 18:9, 20:18, 32:16; 2 Kgs. 16:3, 21:2; Ezek. 5:9, 11, 7:3–4, 44:6–7. Other ritual violations: Gen. 43:32 (Egyptian dining practices), 46:34 (shepherds, to the Egyptians); Exod. 8:22 (certain sacrifices, to Egyptians); Deut. 17:1; Prov. 15:8, 21:27; Isa. 1:13–14, 44:19 (all concern defective sacrifices). The term also refers to moral or ethical faults: Deut. 25:14–16 (using dishonest weights); Prov. 6:16–19 (seven abominations to God, none of them sexual), 11:1 (false scales), 20 (the wicked), 16:5 (haughty person), 29:27 (the unjust). See further Jacob Milgrom, s.v. “*Tô’evah*,” in *Encyclopedia Biblica*, 8:466–68 (in Hebrew).

¹²“Anal intercourse” is apparently the meaning of *משכבי אשה*, “as one lies with a woman.” See Levine, *Leviticus*, p. 123; Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1962), s.v. *משכב*, p. 1012.

¹³Gen. 19 might assume that male rape of other males was considered an outrage, but even if so it was only one among many perpetrated by the men of Sodom. Tikva Frymer-Kensky states that the biblical laws on homosexuality are “best explained as a desire to keep the categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’ intact” (Tikva Frymer-Kensky, s.v. “Sex and sexuality,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:1145). As I argue below, whereas this does hold true for the rabbinic period, her single other supporting source, the prohibition against cross-dressing (Deut. 22:5), is nowhere explicitly linked, as in later rabbinic sources, to homoeroticism.

¹⁴Pieter W. Van der Horst, ed., *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (Leiden, 1978), pp. 81–3.

¹⁵*Pseudo-Phocylides* vv. 190–92 (trans. Van der Horst, pp. 237–40).

Other applications of the law of nature to male homoeroticism are to be found in *2 Enoch*, Philo, Josephus, and *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*.¹⁶ Paul also appears to employ an argument based on "natural law."¹⁷ Although Pseudo-Phocylides appears to refer to "natural law" in line with the idea of a "law of nature," that is, one natural law that governs both animal and human conduct, it is unclear exactly how Philo, Josephus, and Paul employ the concept. Most likely, their "natural law" refers to a man voluntarily surrendering that which makes him uniquely male, that is, his ability to be a sexual penetrator (and for Paul, that which distinguishes a woman—the ability to be vaginally penetrated).¹⁸ Nature, then, is perceived as determining only gender characteristics and expectations, to which humans are expected to adhere.

Such an interpretation accords with other statements in this literature that focus on the pathic, the adult male who allows himself to be sexually penetrated. Philo fulminates against the pathic when speaking both about pederasty and (presumably) nonpederastic male intercourse.¹⁹ But it is Josephus who uses this rhetoric most vividly. In the middle of a passage discussing the military activities of his archenemy, John, Josephus writes:

With an insatiable lust for loot, they ransacked the houses of the wealthy; the murder of men and the violation of women were their sport; they caroused on their spoils, with blood to wash them down, and from mere satiety unscrupulously indulged in effemi-

¹⁶2 *Enoch* 10:4 (version J., ed. James Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. [Garden City, NY, 1983], 1:119, and 120, n. 1); Josephus *Ag. Apion* 2.275; Philo *Spec. Laws* 2.50; 3.39; *Abraham* 135–36. See Helmut Koester, "NOMOS ΦΥΣΕΩΣ: The Concept of Natural Law in Greek Thought," in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden, 1968), pp. 521–41. Philo appears to use the term "against nature" to refer even to the male who is anally penetrating another male. See *Testament of Naphtali* 3:4, and, on this, Lewis John Eron, *Ancient Jewish Attitudes towards Sexuality: A Study of Ancient Jewish Attitudes towards Sexuality as Expressed in the "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs"* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1987), pp. 238–49. It is possible that *Wisdom of Solomon* argues against homoeroticism on the basis of an argument from nature, but this is not clear. See *Wis. Sol.* 14:26 and the note on it in David Winston, ed., *The Wisdom of Solomon in The Anchor Bible*, vol. 43 (Garden City, NY, 1984), p. 280.

¹⁷Rom. 1:26. See Scroggs (n. 5 above), pp. 114–15; Bernadette J. Brooten, "Early Christian Women and Their Cultural Context: Issues of Method in Historical Reconstruction," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico, CA, 1985), pp. 72–75, and "Paul and the Law: How Complete Was the Departure," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Supp. issue 1 (1990): 71–89, especially pp. 80–89.

¹⁸On this use in other sources, see, Plato *Leg.* 636B; Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Ant. Rom.* 16.4; Ovid *Met.* 9.666ff, 731–44; Plutarch *Mor.* 990D–F; Pseudo-Lucian *Erotes* 22; Athenaeus 13, 565C, 605D; Diogenes Laertius 6.65; Seneca *Ep.* 122, 7–8. There is an extensive literature on this topic. See Winkler, *Constraints*, p. 43; Koester; Boswell, *Christianity*, p. 13, n. 22. I follow here the suggestion of Boswell.

¹⁹Philo *Spec. Laws* 3.37–38 (pederasty); 1.325.

nate practices, plaiting their hair and attiring themselves in women's apparel, drenching themselves with perfumes and painting their eyelids to enhance their beauty. And not only did they imitate the dress, but also the passions of women, devising in their excess of lasciviousness unlawful pleasures [ἀσελγείας ἁθεμίτους . . . ἔρωτας] and wallowing as in a brothel in the city, which they polluted from end to end with their foul deeds. Yet, while they wore women's faces, their hands were murderous, and approaching with mincing steps they would suddenly become warriors and whipping out their swords from under their dyed mantles transfix whomsoever they met.²⁰

Josephus combines standard rhetoric on the pathic as an effete with visions of bloodshed and confusion of sexual roles. It is bad enough, he seems to be saying, that they imitate women. But it is much worse that they imitate women while engaging in bloodshed, a particularly masculine vice. It is the confused gender expectations that are worthy of particular opprobrium.

Discussions in this literature of the male who anally penetrates other males are found only in Philo. After a lengthy discussion of the effeminate male who seduces other males, Philo accuses the penetrating partner of “destroying the means of procreation” through his “unnatural pleasure” and teaching effeminacy to youth.²¹ In another passage, he associates hedonism (and, again, effeminacy) with the male who penetrates another male.²² Several other sources appear to assume the association between hedonism (or loss of self-control) and homoeroticism and attribute both to the “other,” usually the Romans.²³

Following the Hebrew Bible, the Jewish authors writing in Greek during the Second Temple Period prohibit male homoeroticism. Like the cultures around them, though, they couch this prohibition in broader cultural assumptions about gender. An extensive discourse developed around the male pathic, who is excoriated. Penetration of another male

²⁰Josephus *War* 4.560–63 (trans. *LCL*, vol. 3, p. 167).

²¹Philo *Spec. Laws* 3.39 (trans. *LCL*, vol. 7, pp. 498–501); τὴν παρὰ φύσιν ἡδονὴν διώκει . . . διαφθείρων τὰς γονὰς. Philo adds a third reason, which is closely related to the first. Intercourse with boys causes a man to ignore intercourse with women, which again hinders procreation.

²²Philo *Abraham* 135.

²³See *Letter of Aristeas* 152 (M. Hadas, ed., *Aristeas to Philocrates (Letter of Aristeas)* [New York, 1951], pp. 160–61); *Sibylline Oracles* 3.185–87 (J. Geffcken, ed., *Die Oracula Sibyllina* [Leipzig, 1902], pp. 57–58); *Sib. Or.* 3.595–600 (ed. Geffcken, pp. 78–79). See also *Sib. Or.* 5.386–96 (ed. Geffcken, p. 123); Josephus *Ag. Apion* 2.275. The Romans, in turn, accused the Greeks of this practice. See Cicero *Tusc.* 4.70. See, further, MacMullen; Lilja, pp. 122–27.

was seen by Philo as hindering procreation and, more generally, as an expression of extreme male licentiousness. Much of this attitude would continue within Palestinian Jewry.

THE RABBIS AND THE PATHIC

Like their Greek and Roman neighbors and the Greek-speaking Jews who wrote before them, Palestinian rabbis focused nearly all of their discourse on homoeroticism on the penetrated male. It is interesting to note in this regard that rabbinic discourse focuses on "males" rather than "men": although some rabbinic sources suggest that intercourse with a boy under the age of nine (or three, according to some opinions) was treated as conceptually distinct from intercourse with older males, the rabbis, in contrast to Greeks and Romans, treated as equal homoerotic intercourse with men and boys.²⁴ The contours of the rabbinic discourse follow four topics: determination of legal liability of the penetrated male; the *kedesh*; cross-dressing; and the humiliation of the sexually penetrated male.

Liability of the Sexually Penetrated Male

Although Lev. 18:22 forbids a man to sexually penetrate another man, the *Sipra*, a tannaitic work redacted around the middle of the third century, focuses its discussion on showing that a man who allows himself to be sexually penetrated is also legally liable.

- A. We heard the punishment, but we did not hear the prohibition.
- B. [Thus] Scripture says, "Do not lie with a male as one lies with a female" [Lev. 18:22].
- C. I only have [here] a prohibition for the penetrator [שוכב], where is there a prohibition for the one penetrated [נשכב]?
- D. Scripture says, "[No Israelite woman shall be a cult prostitute,] nor shall any Israelite man be a cult prostitute" [Deut. 23:18], and it also says ". . . there were also male prostitutes in the land; [(Judah) imitated all the abhorrent practices of the nations that the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites]" [1 Kgs. 14:24].

²⁴See, *t. Sanh.* 10:2 (ed. Moshe Zuckermendal, *Tosephta* [rpt. Jerusalem, 1970], p. 430); *b. Sanh.* 54b; *y. Sanh.* 7:9, 25a (all citations of the Palestinian Talmud follow the pagination of the Venice edition [Leipzig, 1925]); cf. *Sipra Kod.* 9:14 (ed. J. H. Weiss, [Vienna, 1862], 92b). All translations of rabbinic sources, unless noted, are my own. Abbreviations for rabbinic sources, and transliterations for Hebrew, follow the *Journal of Biblical Literature* style sheet (with some minor modifications).

E. R. Akiba says, [do not read] “*Do not lie* with a male as one lies with a female,” [rather,] read it: “*Do not be laid.*”²⁵

For the rabbis, it is axiomatic that there is no true redundancy in the Hebrew Bible: apparent redundancies are meant to teach something. Sections (A) and (B) dispose of the problem of the seeming redundancy of Lev. 18:22 and Lev. 20:13 by identifying the former to refer to the prohibition and the latter to the punishment for male homoerotic acts. (C) poses a new problem. Lev. 18:22 addresses only the penetrator: it does not command that a man should not lie with a man as a woman lies with a man. As Lev. 20:13 ordains death for both partners, the *Sipra* attempts to find a prohibition for the penetrated male. One solution, (D), will be considered below. Rabbi Akiba’s solution, (E), derives the prohibition against a male assuming a passive role in intercourse from Lev. 18:22 itself, repunctuated into the *niphal* conjunction, thus including the passive partner.

In the Palestinian Talmud a discussion of the liability of the sexually penetrated male follows a citation of this tradition from the *Sipra*. Although this discussion is similar to the *Sipra*’s tradition, it has a curious ending: “R. Yosi ben R. Bun said: We learn thus, ‘the two of them have done an abhorrent thing’ [Lev. 20:13]. [This teaches that] both of them [are punished] by stoning; both of them are prohibited; both of them [are subject to being] cut off [from their people.]”²⁶ R. Yosi ben R. Bun rejects the exegeses of both R. Akiba and R. Ishmael, preferring the most obvious solution: Lev. 20:13 explicitly includes both the active and the passive partners. It might be that this fifth generation Palestinian amora (late fourth century C.E.) is somewhat mystified at the tortured reasoning used by his predecessors to derive the punishment of extirpation (as well as death penalty and prohibition) for both partners.

Although the discussion in this passage is ostensibly about the different exegetical styles of rabbis Akiba and Ishmael, there are more serious legal implications. Two parallels in the Babylonian Talmud cite a tradition in the name of a Palestinian rabbi, R. Abbahu, that, following R. Ishmael’s reasoning, a man penetrated by another man is liable for two transgressions, one from Lev. 20:13 and the other from Deut. 23:18.²⁷ To be a passive partner of homoerotic intercourse is worse than to be an active one, even though only the active one is explicitly forbidden in the Hebrew Bible.

This emphasis on the culpability of the pathic might also be reflected in R. Yosi ben R. Bun’s statement in the Palestinian Talmud. To the ear-

²⁵ *Sipra Kod.* 9:14 (ed. Weiss, 92b).

²⁶ *y. Sanh.* 7:9, 25a

²⁷ *b. Sanh.* 54b; *b. Ker.* 3a.

lier rabbis, the absence of discussion of the pathic in the Bible might have been deafening. Whichever exegetical method was used, the topic had to be dealt with. Only later, when this bipolar construction of male homoeroticism (that is, penetrator versus penetrated) perhaps lost some of its strength, could R. Yosi ben R. Bun return to the obvious solution of the legal problem. This might also explain why the discussion of liability of the sexually penetrated male in the Babylonian Talmud is composed solely of sources attributed to Palestine: this same concern with the penetrated male did not exist in Babylonia.

Kedesh

R. Ishmael, in the tradition from the *Sipra* cited above, associates the *kedesh* (cult prostitute) with a penetrated male. The term appears in Deut. 23:18 and 1 Kgs. 14:24. The logic is: (1) the occurrence of the term "abhorrent practices" (*to'evah*) in both 1 Kgs. 14:24 and Lev. 18:22, allows for an association between these verses; because Lev. 18:22 refers to homoeroticism, (2) we can understand the term "male prostitute" (*kedesh*) in 1 Kgs. 14:24 as also referring to men engaged in some type of homoerotic activity; (3) because the term *kedesh* appears also in Deut. 23:18, this verse too can be linked to 1 Kgs. 14:24; and (4) because the term "female prostitute" also appears in Deut. 23:18, a logical analogy can be made between the penetrated female prostitute and the male prostitute, who is now also said to be penetrated.

The history of the tradition that associated the male prostitute mentioned in these two verses with a passive male partner in homoerotic intercourse is by no means clear. Originally, the term *kedesh* might have designated a male cult prostitute, whose role, connected to fertility, was decidedly heterosexual.²⁸ Both the *Septuagint* and *Targum Onkelos* interpret this term in ways that differ both from each other and from the rabbinic interpretation.²⁹ In fact, other early rabbinic parallels of this tradition do not so clearly assign the passive role to the *kedesh*, as does the

²⁸See Loewenstamm (n. 10 above). It is also possible that the *kedesh* had no sexual function. See Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "Tamar, *Qedesa*, *Qadistu*, and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia," *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989): 245–65.

²⁹The *Septuagint* on Deut. 23:17 reads: Οὐκ ἔσται πόρνη ἀπὸ θυγατέρων Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ οὐκ ἔσται πορνεύων ἀπὸ υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ. The confusion extends to 1 (= 3) Kgs. 14:24, as translated in the *Septuagint*: Καὶ σύνδεσμος ἐγενήθη ἐν τῇ γῇ καὶ ἐποίησας ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν βδελυγμάτων. Targum Onkelos on Deut. 23:18, on the other hand, reads: לא תהי אשתא מבנות ישדאל לגבר עבד ולא יסב גברא מבני ישראל אתתא אמה : "A woman from the daughters of Israel should not marry a male slave, and a man from the sons of Israel should not marry a female slave."

Sipra: “[‘They incensed Him with alien things,] vexed Him with abominations’ [Deut. 32:16]—this is homoerotic intercourse. Thus it says ‘Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence’ [Lev. 18:22] and ‘there were also male prostitutes in the land’ [1 Kgs. 14:24].”³⁰ It is not clear here whether or not 1 Kgs. 14:24 is being used to refer to a sexually penetrated male; in a parallel source 1 Kgs. 14:24 is cited together with Deut. 23:18 as the sole prooftexts for the prohibition of what is presumably all homoerotic activity.³¹ These sources, then, might reflect a rabbinic association of homoeroticism with both penetrating and penetrated cultic prostitution. The *Sipra* is the first source to interpret this tradition as referring to the pathic.

It is likely that in Roman Palestine, as in Rome itself, boys (and perhaps older male slaves) could be hired and sexually penetrated by other men.³² The rabbis understood the biblical *kedesh* in light of this cultural institution and used this understanding in their discourses on the pathic. The rabbinic understanding of *kedesh* as pathic prostitute itself testifies to the rabbinic concern with, and negative attitudes toward, the sexually penetrated male.

Cross-Dressing

Deut. 22:5 prohibits a man from wearing a woman’s clothes and vice versa. The rabbis invoke this verse in their justification of a prohibition forbidding a man to pluck his hairs.³³ These discussions, although found only in the Babylonian Talmud, are attributed either to tannaim or to third-generation (late third to early fourth centuries C.E.) rabbis from Palestine. The prohibition seems originally to have been aimed at the pathic. Precisely in these traditions can a difference between Palestinian and Babylonian assumptions about homoerotic intercourse and the pathic be discerned. In *b. Nazir* 59a, the redactor explains this prohibition as due to the fear that a man, by appearing like a woman, will slip disguised among women, leading to a greater chance of heterosexual

³⁰ *Sipra* Deut. 318 (ed. Louis Finkelstein, *Sipra on Deuteronomy* [rpt. New York, 1969], p. 364).

³¹ *Midrash Tana'im ad Deut. 32:16* (ed. David Hoffman, *Midrash Tana'im on Sefer Devarim* [n.d.], pp. 194–95).

³² On male pathic prostitution, see Werner A. Krenkel, “Prostitution,” in *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome*, ed. Michael Grant and Rachel Kitzinger, 3 vols. (New York, 1988), 2:1291–97, especially pp. 1295–97; Boswell, *Christianity*, pp. 77–80.

³³ *b. Shab.* 94b; *b. Nazir* 59a; *b. Mak.* 20b. The exegetical link between cross-dressing and homoeroticism (though not hair-plucking) might be due in part to the occurrence of the word “abomination” (*תועבת*) in Deut. 22:5. See also the *Targum Yerushalmi* to this verse.

immorality. If I am correct that the original discussions assumed the subject to be the male pathic, then the redactor did not understand the sexual assumptions and anxieties that originally informed this Palestinian tradition.³⁴

A similar tradition can be found in the Babylonian Talmud:

A. We have learnt: Six things are a disgrace for a disciple: he should not go to the market when he is fragranced . . .

B. "He should not go to the market when he is fragranced":

C. Rabbi Abba son of Rabbi Hiyyah son of Rabbi Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: This prohibition obtains in a place where they are suspected of homoerotic intercourse.

D. Rav Sheshet said: They only said this concerning his clothes, but concerning his body, [fragrance conceals] the sweat.

E. Rav Pappa said: His hair is like his clothes [that is, should not be perfumed].

F. Some say it [a different version of (E)]: It [his hair] is like his body [hence, may be perfumed].³⁵

From the other items in (A) (omitted here), it appears that the reason behind the tannaitic source is to prevent disciples from intimate contact with the *opposite* sex.³⁶ Ironically, Rabbi Yohanan (a Palestinian rabbi from the late third century) then limits the application of (A) to situations that involve the danger of homoerotic intercourse. A disciple should not use perfume in a place (a city or Gentile markets?) where people are suspected of homoerotic intercourse lest he himself be suspected (by whom?) of homoerotic activity. Minimally, R. Yohanan assumes that most people, upon seeing a perfumed man in a market within a city in which this activity was common, would presume that he was engaged in homoerotic activity.³⁷ The Babylonian rabbis in (D), (E), and (F) further limit R. Yohanan (or perhaps just [A]), but their focus is different. Their concern is identifying exactly what one can and cannot per-

³⁴See also *y. Yoma* 6:3, 43d, a Palestinian tradition in which one contender for the post of High Priest attempts to slander his brother by suggesting that he dresses in women's clothes.

³⁵*b. Ber.* 43b.

³⁶There is a parallel to this tradition in the later tractate *Derekh Eretz*. See Michael Higger, *The Treatises Derek Erez* (New York, 1935), p. 290. In his commentary on this parallel, Daniel Sperber compares this passage to Greek and Roman parallels that indicate a connection between perfuming and effeminacy and concludes that it refers to homoerotic activity. See Daniel A. Sperber, *Commentary on Derekh Erez Zuta* (Ramat-Gan, 1990), pp. 53–54.

³⁷Alternatively, it might be a special place frequented by male prostitutes within the market. See, for example, Plautus *Curculio* vv. 481–82, which talks of the "Tuscan quarter" of the Forum Romanum that male prostitutes frequented. My thanks to an anonymous referee for this reference.

fume. Whether (A) itself refers to the danger of heterosexual or homoerotic liaisons becomes irrelevant for the Babylonian rabbis. For R. Yohanan and his Palestinian contemporaries, males who perfume and depilate display characteristics that might identify them as a pathic. These traditions certainly suggest the presence in Roman Palestine of *cinaedi*, effeminate men, perhaps even organized in some way, who enjoyed being penetrated by other men.³⁸

Humiliation and the Pathic

Males who were sexually penetrated were considered humiliated. An example of this attitude can be found in a Palestinian tradition:

It is written, "May [the guilt] fall upon the head of Yoab. . . . May the house of Yoab never be without someone suffering from a discharge or an eruption, or a male who handles the spindle, or one slain by the sword, or one lacking bread" [2 Sam. 3:29]. "A male who handles the spindle"—this is Yoash, "they inflicted punishments on Yoash" [2 Chr. 24:24]. Taught R. Ishmael: This teaches that they appointed over him cruel guards who never knew a woman and they would abuse him the way one abuses a woman. Just as when it is said, "Israel's pride will be humbled before his very eyes" [Hos. 5:5]. [Read instead:] "And he will abuse Israel's pride before his very eyes."³⁹

The tradition identifies the later king Yoash, a descendant of Yoab, as the referent of the prophecy "the male who handles the spindle," one like a woman. To be like a woman, the midrash says, means to be penetrated. The physical penetration of Yoash represents more than just a form of

³⁸The rabbis, Philo, and Josephus, all present consistent portraits of the effeminate pathic: perhaps a social reality underlies them. Roman authors employ the same rhetorical tropes. As Richlin has convincingly argued, their statements most likely reflect the real existence of *cinaedi* in Rome. See Richlin, "Not Before Homosexuality" (n. 3 above).

³⁹*y. Qidd.* 1:7, 61a. See also *Mekb. Beshlah Amalek* 1 (ed. H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin, *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael* [rpt. Jerusalem, 1970], p. 177); and the parallel in *Mekb. d'Rashbi* (ed. Jacob N. Epstein and Ezra Z. Melamed, *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai* [Jerusalem, n.d.], p. 119). The exegesis derives from a wordplay on "שפוטים שפטים." On the meaning and derivation of this word, which clearly refers here to "sport, sodomy," see Samuel Krauss, *Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrasch, und Targum*, 2 vols., ed. and rev. Immanuel Löw (rpt. Hildesheim, 1964) 2:582–83; J. Perles, "Miscellen zur rabbinischen Sprach- und Alterthumskunde," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 21 (1872): 271–72; Louis Ginzberg, "Review of Festschrift zu Israel Lewy's siebzigstem Geburtstag," *Revue des Études Juives* 66 (1913): 297–315; Daniel Sperber, "פויטינון," *Studies in Hebrew and Semitic Languages Dedicated to the Memory of Prof. Eduard Yechezkel Kutscher* (Ramat-Gan, 1980), pp. 155–58 (in Hebrew).

torture; it conveys complete humiliation. Although the setting of the midrash is "exceptional"—penetration is used in a prison setting as a form of abuse—rhetorically the message is clear. Penetration, emphasized by the implied reference to the sexual frenzy of the guards, is equated with "feminization" and humiliation.

This sentiment, linking penetration, feminization, and power, can be seen even more clearly in another Palestinian statement. Referring to Esau, Israel laments to God, "Is it not enough that we are subjugated to the seventy nations, but even to this one, who is penetrated like women?"⁴⁰ The tradition assumes that a man who is penetrated cannot rule like a man. Here, as in other places in rabbinic literature, Esau probably represents Rome.⁴¹ Israel, seeing that homoerotic intercourse occurs in Rome, complains that Rome, in effect, has no right to rule not because Romans are engaged in homoerotic intercourse *per se*, but specifically because they allow themselves to be penetrated. By allowing themselves to be penetrated, they sacrifice their "maleness," a prerequisite for power.

The language and superficial topics under discussion by Palestinian rabbis of the third and fourth centuries might be biblical, but their assumptions about homoeroticism certainly are not. Underneath these few and scattered traditions lurks the same complex attitude toward that pathic as exhibited in Roman sources. For a man to allow himself to be penetrated was tantamount to him "effeminizing" himself, a prospect viewed with loathing by (at least) the male elite of antiquity.

FEMALE HOMOEROTICISM

Rabbinic literature, of course, was written by men for a primarily male audience. It is therefore not surprising to find very little rabbinic discussion of female homoeroticism. There might also be other reasons, however, for the relative silence of the rabbinic sources on female homoeroticism.

In the few rabbinic sources that do discuss female homoeroticism, the primary concern appears to be gender blurring. According to the *Tosefta*, "If a woman 'rubs' with her minor son, and he penetrates her, the School of Shammai disqualifies her [from marrying a priest], but the School of Hillel permit it."⁴² A priest is prohibited from marrying a woman who

⁴⁰ *Gen. Rab.* 63:10 (ed. Hanoah Albeck and Judah Theodor, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 2d ed. [rpt. Jerusalem, 1965], p. 693).

⁴¹ See Gerson D. Cohen, "Esau as a Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," in *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures*, ed. Gerson D. Cohen (Philadelphia, 1991), pp. 243–61.

⁴² *t. Sotā* 5:7 (ed. Saul Lieberman, *The Tosefta: The Orders of Zeraim, Moed, Nashim, Nezikin*, 4 vols. [New York, 1955–88], 3.2:178). The term for "rub, sport with," המסליל ,

has had unsanctioned sex (*bi'elat znut*): the *Tosefta* here asks if some kind of penile penetration of a minor counts as “unsanctioned sex.” The Palestinian Talmud contains a slightly different version of this tradition:

A. If a woman “rubs” with her son, the School of Shammai forbids her [from marrying a priest]. The School of Hillel allows [her to marry a priest].

B. If two women “rub” with each other the School of Shammai forbids her [from marrying a priest]. The School of Hillel allows [her to marry a priest].⁴³

(A) omits the *Tosefta*’s phrase “he penetrates her.” This omission is crucial, as “rub with” now becomes so ambiguous that it can be taken to refer to sexual acts that do not involve penetration. Only from this omission can (B) follow. If (A) does not refer to penile penetration, then the question arises as to the status of women who conduct this activity with other women.⁴⁴ Whether or not one accepts the attribution as genuine, the transmission of the source—and its lack of resolution—indicates an ambivalence about female homoeroticism.⁴⁵

No such ambivalence is evident in another rabbinic source:

A. “You shall not copy the practices of the land of Egypt . . . or of the land of Canaan” [Lev. 18:3].

B. Is it possible that one should not build buildings or not plant vineyards like them?

C. Scripture says, “Nor shall you follow their laws.” I am only talk-

is found in some manuscripts as *המסלול*. I take *הערה בה* as referring to penetration of a woman by a penis. See the parallel at *b. Sanh.* 69b.

⁴³y. *Git.* 8:10, 49c.

⁴⁴Note that the Palestinian Talmud, unlike Roman authors, apparently can conceive of female homoerotic contact without penetration of a woman. See also *b. 'Abod. Zar.* 44a, in which a woman is said to make a dildo for her daily use: this is unambiguously condemned.

⁴⁵The redactorial issues involved in this passage are complex. Did the redactor of the Palestinian Talmud receive this tradition or manufacture it? Can parts (A) and (B) be from different sources? I think it probable that the passage is unified and post-tannaitic. The tradition presents itself as an alternate to *t. Soṭa* 5:7. If the primacy of *t. Soṭa* 5:7 is accepted, then it appears that at some point the phrase *הערה בה* was first eliminated, and then (B) was added based on a new understanding of *מסלול*. Otherwise, it is necessary to postulate that two very different, competing versions of the same tradition were in circulation. Regardless, the attribution of this tradition to the Schools of Hillel and Shammai, which flourished in the first century C.E., should not be taken seriously: (1) attributions to the Schools are notoriously unreliable (see Jacob Neusner, *Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70*, 3 vols. [Leiden, 1971], 3:143–79); (2) a parallel tradition at *b. Yebam.* 76a ascribes the tradition to a significantly later rabbi. Such an attribution would have been highly unlikely had the earlier attribution been known.

ing about those laws which are legislated [that is, distinctive] for them and for their fathers and for their fathers' fathers.

D. And what would they do?

E. A man would marry a man; and a woman [would marry a] woman; and a man would marry a woman and her daughter; and a woman would marry two [men].

F. Therefore it says, "Nor shall you follow their laws."⁴⁶

(E) includes the reference to marriage between women. Female homoeroticism *per se* is not condemned; the condemnation is reserved for marriage. This source suggests that a woman playing the role of husband is as unacceptable as a man playing the role of wife. It is interesting to note that of the four liaisons mentioned, only this liaison is nowhere hinted at or mentioned in Lev. 18.⁴⁷ A nonobservant reader or listener would assume that there is scriptural basis to this prohibition, thus strengthening it. Where gender blurring exists, as would happen in female-female marriage but not necessarily in female homoerotic contact, there is no ambivalence: it is forcefully condemned.

THE ANDROGUNOS

A more impressive example of the rabbinic anxiety over gender blurring is reflected in rabbinic treatment of the *androgynos*, or hermaphrodite.⁴⁸ Since men and women are obligated to perform different commandments, determination of the obligations of the hermaphrodite is a question that vexes the rabbis in many different contexts.⁴⁹ It is the rabbinic discussion of sexual relations with a hermaphrodite that is relevant to this discussion.

The *Mishnah*, for example, states that intercourse between a male and a hermaphrodite is equivalent to homoerotic intercourse.⁵⁰ The *Tosefta* cites and glosses this tradition:

⁴⁶ *Sipra Abare* 9:8 (ed. Weiss, 85c–85d). See also *Gen. Rab.* 26:6 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, p. 248); *Lev. Rab.* 23:9 (ed. Mordecai Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah*, 5 vols. [Jerusalem, 1956], 3:539).

⁴⁷ The prohibition of polyandry is implied throughout Lev. 18 and is in fact a violation of the laws against adultery.

⁴⁸ For the identification of the *androgynos* with the hermaphrodite, see *b. Yebam.* 83b; Krauss, *Lehnwörter*, 2:64–65, s.v. "Mannweib, Zwitter".

⁴⁹ For an overview of regulation concerning the hermaphrodite, see Meyer Berlin and Shlomo Josef Zevin, eds., *Encyclopedia Talmudica*, 21 vols. (Jerusalem, 1974), 1:386–99. Some of this rhetoric was no doubt inspired by the rabbinic, especially mishnaic, need to categorize. See above and Jacob Neusner, *Judaism: The Evidence of the Mishnah* (Chicago, 1981), pp. 256–70.

⁵⁰ *m. Yebam.* 8:6 (ed. Hanoach Albeck, *The Mishnah*, 6 vols. [rpt. Jerusalem, 1988], 3:44).

A. R. Eleazer [or Eliezer] said, I heard that regarding an *androgynos* that those who lie with him deserve stoning, like [one who lies with] a male.

B. To what does this [opinion] apply? In a time when he comes upon him the way of males [דרך זכרות], but if he does not come upon him [in] the way of males, he is not liable.⁵¹

In the *Mishnah*, according to (A), the hermaphrodite is counted as a male for sexual purposes, so a man who penetrates a hermaphrodite either vaginally or anally would be accounted liable as if he penetrated another male. The *Tosefta*'s gloss in (B) limits this to intercourse in "the way of males," most likely anal penetration,⁵² but declares vaginal intercourse not to be a capital crime. For this tradition, the possession of male genitalia is not in itself determinative of being "male." That is, when an *androgynos* is penetrated vaginally, the act is not a capital crime. Only when penetrated anally does the act come perilously close to male homosexuality and is thus prohibited.

It is also significant that an *androgynos* "marries but is not married as men are."⁵³ Because the *androgynos* possesses a penis, s/he cannot "be married," that is, be a wife to another man. Yet, although the *androgynos* possesses a vagina, s/he is permitted "to marry" a woman. Behind this rule lurks again the rabbinic fear of making a man—or someone who looks very much like a man—into a wife.

THE PENETRATOR

Rabbinic conceptions of the pathic, which centered on gender blurring, could not easily be transferred to the male who sexually penetrates another male. The rabbis considered male sexual attraction to other males to be unexceptional. Among a number of restrictions in the *Mishnah* regarding the separation of the sexes, for example, is a statement attributed to Rabbi Yehudah that prohibits two unmarried men from sleeping

⁵¹ *t. Yebam.* 10:2 (ed. Lieberman, 3:31). See also *b. Yebam.* 82b, 83b; *y. Yebam.* 8:6, 9d. According to Lieberman, the version from the *Tosefta* is "certain," or original. See Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-fshutah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta*, 10 vols. (New York, 1955–88), 6:94 (in Hebrew). R. Eleazer's statement (A) is paralleled in more biblical language at *b. Yebam.* 83b. It is possible that the curious phrasing of the *Tosefta* confused the rabbis as well.

⁵² This is one of the few places in the rabbinic corpus that the term דרך זכרות is employed; in another source it appears to mean heterosexual anal intercourse (*y. Ketub.* 3:9, 27d; *y. Sanh.* 7:14, 25c). Use of the term in this context might be intended to emphasize the "maleness" of the penetrated *androgynos*. See Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-fshuta*, 6:94–96.

⁵³ *t. Bik.* 2:4 (ed. Lieberman, 1:289).

under a single blanket.⁵⁴ The rabbis followed the Hebrew Bible in prohibiting all (or nearly all) sexual penetration of another male. How did the Palestinian rabbis understand the penetrator? Although it is much more limited than the discourse on the pathic, rabbinic discourse on this topic roughly divides into three categories: arrogance, hedonism, and associations with bestiality.

Arrogance

For the rabbis, the penetration of one man by another represents haughtiness, that is, power that has gone beyond its God-given bounds. On the one hand, penetration of another male is seen as a sign of dominance, but on the other this way of expressing that dominance is seen as an affront to God. Pharaoh, noted for his power and arrogance, is portrayed in a tannaitic source as a penetrator of other males:

[Referring to Exod. 15:9: "The foe said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall have its fill of them. I will bare my sword—my hand shall subdue them.'"] It is not written here, "shall be satisfied upon them," but "my desire shall have its fill of them"—they will satisfy their desire upon me. . . . In the past if you sought to violate their wives and their sons and their daughters, I used to hold you responsible by the laws of the kingdom. But now, "my hand shall subdue them." Some say: It is not written "I will point my sword," but "I will bare my sword," [Pharaoh] intended to have intercourse [as the active partner] with their males, like it is said "they shall unsheathe their swords against your prized shrewdness" [Ezek. 28:7]—it is said "they will *unsheathe* their swords," and because he was haughty and proud of heart God brought him low and the nations abused him.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *m. Qidd.* 4:14 (ed. Albeck, 3:329). This mishnah continues with rules about male and female sexual contact. According to J. N. Epstein, the statements that follow Rabbi Yehudah's were added later (Jacob N. Epstein, *Introduction to the Text of the Mishnah* [Jerusalem, 1964], p. 977 [in Hebrew]). If correct, this would indicate that (1) Rabbi Yehudah's statement was emphatic, by virtue of its placement at the very end of the Tractate; and, conversely, that (2) the addition of statements concerning proper male and female sexual behavior served to refocus the emphasis of both Rabbi Yehudah's statement and the Tractate itself. See also *t. Qidd.* 5:10 (ed. Lieberman, 3.2:296–97); *y. Qidd.* 4:11, 66c; *b. Qidd.* 82a. These sources try too hard to dismiss the suspicion that Jewish men could engage in homoerotic intercourse. Suspicion, though, is not the same as sexual desire. See also *t. Mo'ed Qat* 2:16 (ed. Lieberman, 2:372); *b. Pesah.* 51a; *y. Pesah.* 4:1, 30d.

⁵⁵ *Mekh. Beshalah* (ed. Horovitz, p. 140, paralleled at *Mekh. d'Rashbi* [ed. Epstein, p. 89]). The translation is slightly modified from Jacob Lauterbach, *Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1933–35), 2:56–57. Goldin translates this passage as referring

This midrash gradually builds on the theme of Pharaoh's arrogance and his ultimate punishment. Each of Pharaoh's outrageous desires is punished appropriately. The midrash culminates with an exegesis that attributes to Pharaoh a desire for homoerotic intercourse. From the last line of the unit—"and because he was haughty and proud of heart"—it appears that of all the examples of arrogant acts perpetrated by Pharaoh, this was perceived as being the worst. Not only, though, does the desire for homoerotic intercourse serve as an example of his arrogance; it also sets up the most dramatic portrayal of his punishment. The nations "abuse him" (בְּזוּהוּ), which, following the pattern of the rest of the unit and in line with the general rabbinic hermeneutical method of "measure for measure," probably refers to Pharaoh being penetrated in homoerotic intercourse, an interpretation made explicit in later versions of the story.⁵⁶ Pharaoh's extreme expression of arrogance leads to his extreme punishment and humiliation at the hands of the nations.

A second, later Palestinian source also captures this attitude. Earthquakes occur, R. Aḥa says, "on account of the sin of homoerotic intercourse. God said, You cause your limb to quiver [that is, you ejaculate] over something that is not yours. By your life, I shall cause my world to shake on account of that very man."⁵⁷ Underneath the (not particularly successful) wordplay lurks the concept that homoerotic intercourse is an act of hubris, of sexually using something not belonging to one. As in the case of Pharaoh, the penetration of a person not appropriated by God for penetration warrants divine punishment.⁵⁸

Hedonism

Hedonism as a reason for condemnation of the male sexual penetrator of other males is related to that of arrogance. Like Philo, Palestinian rabbis

to "pederasty," which detracts from the force of the last phrase (Judah Goldin, *The Song at the Sea* [New Haven, CT, 1971], pp. 182–83).

⁵⁶ *Talk. Shimonī*, 249. See the apparatus in *Mekh.* (ed. Horovitz, p. 140). See especially *Tanh.* 8: "Pharaoh was one of four men who made themselves gods, and who were penetrated [נִבְעֵלוּ] like women. They are: Hiram, Nebuchednezzar, Yoash, and Pharaoh." See further Marc Bregman, *The Tanhuma-Yelammedenu Literature: Studies in the Evolution of Versions* (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1991), n. 413, pp. 257–58 (in Hebrew). My thanks to Marc Bregman for bringing this source to my attention.

⁵⁷ *y. Ber.* 9:3, 13c. אָמַר רַבִּי אַחָא בַּעֲוֹן מִשְׁכָּב זָכוֹר אָמַר הַב"ה אֵתָה זִיעוּצָתָהּ אֵיבָרְךָ עַל דְּבַר שְׂאִינוּ שֶׁךְ. חֵיִךְ שְׂאִי מִזְעוּעַ עוֹלָמִי עַל אוֹתוֹ הָאִישׁ . . .

⁵⁸ The phrase "cause your limb to quiver" is closely paralleled at *m. Nid.* 5:2 (parallel at *b. Nid.* 13a), but there it refers to a man having an uncontrollable genital emission. R. Aḥa's

deemed male homoerotic intercourse to be a sign of excess: one who goes beyond the God-given bounds of sexuality approaches the slippery slope of loss of control that inevitably leads to idolatry. Yehezkel Cohen writes, regarding the rabbinic attitude toward Gentiles, "The Gentile is described as a corrupt person sexually. He is lascivious and commits adultery with married women. Incest is also a common occurrence in his family. The same is true regarding homosexuality and *mishkan behema* (sexual relations with animals). The Gentile society is lecherous, men and women alike."⁵⁹ Accusations of Gentile male homoerotic intercourse thus is part of the broader concept of Gentile sexual lechery, which itself is representative of the Gentile's denial of God's covenant.⁶⁰

Gentile lack of sexual self-control is seen as so strong that some rabbinic sources advocate keeping one's male children away from Gentile men.⁶¹ Ishmael is identified with the three transgressions of murder, idolatry and 'arayot—where 'arayot is identified as referring to both general sexual promiscuity and to homoerotic intercourse.⁶² According to a passage in the *Sipra*, "Just as 'the practices of the Canaanite' [Lev. 18:3], [who] are steeped in idolatry, 'arayot, murder, homoerotic intercourse and bestiality, so too 'the practices of the Egyptians,' [Lev. 18:3]."⁶³ Again we see the connection of male homoeroticism with other horrible offenses, but here the source highlights the proclivity toward these things as inherent characteristics of both the Canaanites and the

suggestion follows another one suggesting that earthquakes arise from nonobservance of the agricultural laws of *terumah* and *ma'asrot* (both forms of tithing). The wordplay would work if עולם is a euphemism for penis, but I have not been able to find an example of that usage.

⁵⁹Yehezkel Cohen, "The Attitude to the Gentile in the Halakhah and in Reality in the Tannaitic Period," *Immanuel* 9 (1979): 34. See also David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism* (Toronto, 1983), pp. 199–213.

⁶⁰An integrative study of rabbinic *assumptions* and conceptions of the Gentile is a desideratum. I do not deny that this same rhetoric serves to "other" the Gentile: like Herodotus's attributions of strange sexual practices to the Egyptians and Persians and the Roman rhetoric on "Greek love," the rabbis linked homoerotic and other sexual misconduct to Gentiles. While this is no doubt a function of this rabbinic rhetoric, I contend that the conceptual basis for it is more complex. On the attribution of sexual peculiarities to the "other" as a rhetorical trope among ancient historians, see Herodotus 1.199–202; François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, trans. Janet Lloyd (rpt. Berkeley, 1988); p. 226; MacMullen (n. 4 above).

⁶¹t. 'Abod. Zar. 3:2 (ed. Zuckerman, p. 463).

⁶²t. *Soṭa* 6:6 (ed. Lieberman, 3.2:185–86). The "authentic" description of Ishmael's activity, found in the Erfurt manuscript, is curious: נכבש על הגגרת. On the meaning of this phrase, see Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-fshutah*, 8:670. The grouping of these three transgressions comprise something of a trope in rabbinic literature. See Burton L. Visotzky, "Mortal Sins," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 44 (1990): 31–53.

⁶³*Sipra Abare* 13:7 (ed. Weiss, 86a).

Egyptians—that is, Gentiles. The trigger for this interpretation is of course Lev. 18:3, which introduces the long list of prohibitions that include the incest restrictions, homoerotic intercourse, and bestiality. Yet absent from the biblical list are murder and perhaps idolatry. This suggests that biblical interpretation alone does not lie behind this text.⁶⁴ Rather, the rabbis create the Gentile as the antithesis of the Jew and all that is godly: he or she exercises no self-control, surrendering to the first impulses of violence and lust. Homoeroticism becomes, for the rabbis, just one example of this ungodly lust.

Associations with Bestiality

Rabbinic literature subtly links homoeroticism to bestiality. This association is accomplished in three ways. First, homoeroticism and bestiality are often grouped in rabbinic vice catalogues.⁶⁵ Second, the legal and exegetical discussions about homoeroticism and bestiality usually occur together, and the forms that these discussions take are strikingly similar.⁶⁶ Hence, in a passage from the *Mekhilta* the form that establishes liability for the passive male partner of a bestial relationship mirrors—even down to the same biblical verses—that for establishing the liability for a passive homoerotic partner.⁶⁷ The association is in part due to the contingency of the biblical verses that prohibit male homoeroticism and bestiality (Lev. 18:23, 20:15–16), but the extent and quality of these similarities seem to point to a larger conceptual link.

Indeed, such a link is indicated by the linguistic evidence. Both Greek and Latin have words that are used to designate, almost exclusively, homoerotic anal intercourse.⁶⁸ The word most frequently employed in the rabbinic sources to designate homoerotic male intercourse is *rb'*. The word is used in the biblical verses against bestiality (Lev. 18:23, 20:16) and means something like “mount.” The Bible uses the same word to designate the breeding of mixed animal species (Lev. 19:19). These two

⁶⁴See also *Sipra Ahare* 9:8 (ed. Weiss, 85c–d), which attributes homoerotic marriage to Gentiles.

⁶⁵*m. 'Abod. Zar.* 2:1 (ed. Albeck, 4:238); *t. 'Abod. Zar.* 3:2 (ed. Zuckerman, p. 463). The latter appears to gloss the former. See also *Sipra Ahare* 13:7 (ed. Weiss, 86a); *t. Qidd.* 5:10 (ed. Lieberman, 3.2:296–97); *y. Qidd.* 4:11, 66c.

⁶⁶For example, *Mekh. Nez.* 17 (ed. Horovitz, p. 310); *b. Sanh.* 54b, 58a. See also *m. Qidd.* 4:14 (ed. Albeck, 3:329); *b. Qidd.* 82a; *y. Qidd.* 1:1, 58c; *y. Ketub.* 1:3, 25b.

⁶⁷*Mekh. Nez.* 17 (ed. Horovitz, p. 310).

⁶⁸Greek: *pugizein*; Latin: *pedico*. See Jeffrey Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy* (New Haven, CT, 1975), pp. 201–2; James N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London, 1982), pp. 123–25, 226; Boswell, “Concepts,” p. 80.

meanings for the root *rb'* continue in the rabbinic literature.⁶⁹ In the rabbinic literature, however, a third meaning appears: male homoerotic intercourse.⁷⁰ To my knowledge, no source in Palestinian or early rabbinic literature uses this word to denote heterosexual intercourse.⁷¹ The word is reserved for animal intercourse, intercourse between a human and an animal, and homoerotic intercourse.

These contextual and linguistic uses suggest a strategy of linking homoerotic activity and bestiality. A wide range of vocabulary was available to the rabbis to indicate homoerotic anal intercourse.⁷² Although they did occasionally use these more neutral terms, later rabbinic sources tended to choose verbs that typically designate animal copulation. Minimally, the association between male homoeroticism and bestiality is a sign of rabbinic disapproval; more likely, it can be located within the larger discourse on the male who sexually penetrates other males. Men, like animals, were not objects appropriated by God for sexual penetration. Men who sexually penetrated other men might well have been penetrating an animal. Both were arrogant and rebellious acts.

CONCLUSIONS

Palestinian rabbinic discourse on homoeroticism is characterized by two traits: concern over gender boundaries and the divinely ordained limits on sexuality. The extensive discourse on the male who allows himself to be sexually penetrated bears much in common with contemporary discussions among non-Jews, as well as those found in earlier nonrabbinic Jewish sources. Rabbinic understanding of the male who penetrates other males too finds some precedent in Philo. Whereas similarities between rabbinic and contemporary non-Jewish constructions of homoeroticism are clear, the differences should not be overlooked. For the rabbis, gender boundaries were paramount in regard to the pathic. Yet while for the Romans gender associations were highly politicized, rabbinic sources rarely explicitly link gender and political discourses.⁷³ The

⁶⁹See Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, 2 vols. (London, 1886–1903), 2:1444, s.v. רכע.

⁷⁰*b. Yebam.* 25a; *b. Sanh.* 9b, 70a; *b. Mak.* 6a.

⁷¹The evolution of this term might be based on the position of intercourse. A male penetrating another male may have been seen as animals mounting each other; regardless, the word choice is significant. Not once to my knowledge is *rb'* applied to heterosexual anal intercourse.

⁷²For example, *הבא על הזכר* (*m. Sanh.* 7:4 [ed. Albeck, 4:191]). To indicate anal intercourse, the term *ביאה שלא כדרכה* is commonly employed for heterosexual anal intercourse (it is never used for male homoerotic intercourse).

⁷³The question of rabbinic perceptions of power, especially as they relate to gender relations, needs further study. For a statement on the complexity of rabbinic views of women

entire rabbinic understanding of men who sexually penetrate other men is unparalleled in contemporary non-Jewish authors and probably reflects the fundamental difference between these communities on the question of who sets limits on sexuality. Romans saw the individual citizen male as primarily responsible for sexual self-control; according to the rabbis, it is God, whose words are revealed through rabbinic interpretation, who sets sexual limits. This difference, in turn, might well have arisen from the differing political conditions between Romans and Jews. For the (wealthy) adult male Roman citizen, sexual penetration, as well as sexual restraint, were political acts, assertions of one's power over others and oneself. That is, for the Roman, the subjugated Jews would have been linked, on some level, to those who were penetrated, an idea that clearly would have made the Jews uncomfortable. For the rabbis (who were, juridically, virtually powerless) and the Jews (who were politically dominated by Rome) of late antiquity, sexual penetration and self-control were not understood politically. Rabbinic discourse linked homoeroticism to those areas that a Jew in late antiquity could control—gender integrity and the individual relationship to the divine.

It is worth considering what the rabbis did *not* argue. They did not argue that homoeroticism was wrong because it was impure; or that it was the sin of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah; or that it was “unnatural”; or that it interfered with procreation (as did Philo). All of these arguments would develop in time; but if any of these conceptions of homoeroticism came to the minds of the rabbis, they did not transmit them for posterity.

So was there a concept such as “homosexuality” in rabbinic society? No evidence suggests that the rabbis defined people by the gender of the object of their sexual desire. John Boswell is correct to warn against reading too much into this silence, but compared to Roman sources, the rabbinic silence on this issue is impressive.⁷⁴ Penetration, not same-sex desire, was problematic for the rabbis. Were there Jews engaged in homoerotic relationships? Without doubt, yes, although the evidence is scant.⁷⁵ On the other hand, considering the relatively small number and

and male power, see Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (New York, 1988). On the Roman politicization of sex, see Richlin, “Not Before Homosexuality,” pp. 543–54.

⁷⁴Boswell, “Concepts,” pp. 69–70.

⁷⁵The only Palestinian rabbinic source that suggests a “real” homoerotic relationship is *y. Sanh.* 6:6, 23c. The rabbinic sources on male sexual desire might also indicate that male homoeroticism did occur (see above). Epstein (n. 7 above) reads these sources as evidence that there was practically no Jewish homoeroticism in late antiquity (pp. 136–37). That Israel is “not suspected” of bestiality or homoeroticism, however, means merely that *most*

limitations of rabbinic sources, we should not expect to find much on this topic. We are simply in no position to evaluate the institutions and extent of Jewish homoeroticism in rabbinic Palestine.

Finally, what can this rabbinic evidence teach about nonrabbinic Jewish communities in late antique Palestine? It is likely, at minimum, that rabbinic constructions of homoeroticism were shared by many others, if only because these constructions appear to be rooted in deep-seated assumptions. We cannot know, however, whether these assumptions were also shared by those Jews of very different social statuses or by the marginalized themselves, those men and women engaged in homoerotic activities.

Jewish men do not engage in homoeroticism, not that *no* Jewish men—or even fewer Jewish than Roman men—engage in homoerotic acts. Compare *t. 'Erub.* 5:10 (ed. Lieberman, 2:113): The common folk are “not suspected” of violating the agricultural laws of the seventh year. It would be silly to assume that in fact violations of these laws did not occur. We of course do not know the quality of homoerotic relationships. Bradley Artson has argued that the rabbis were unfamiliar with “loving” homoerotic relationships (Bradley Shavit Artson, “Judaism and Homosexuality,” *Tikkun* 3:2 [1988]: 52–54, 92–93). Rabbinic traditions, however, do appear to be familiar with (and disapprove of) same-sex marriages, which also appear to have existed in Roman antiquity. See Boswell, “Concepts,” p. 73. Bernadette Brooten informs me that she has found evidence for stable female-female relationships in Roman Egypt.



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Nudity and Narrative

Observations on the Frescoes from the Dura Synagogue

Warren G. Moon

In memory of Kathleen J. Shelton

“ALADEN’S LAMP HAD been rubbed and suddenly from the dry, brown, bare desert had appeared paintings, not just one nor a panel nor a wall but a whole building of scene after scene, all drawn from the Old Testament in ways never dreamed of before”; thus Clark Hopkins described his astonishment, in 1932, at the newly discovered frescoes from the synagogue at Dura Europos. So many paintings were excavated, in fact, from such a variety of domestic and religious contexts at Dura that the site was dubbed “the Pompeii of the Syrian desert.” The site had been identified as early as 1920, after British soldiers found, quite by chance, a large wall painting from the Temple of Bel. Systematic exploration was eventually conducted jointly by the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters and Yale University, 1929-1937, and, in 1991, the French and the Syrians at last reopened the excavation of Dura.

Scholars from a wide range of disciplines have tried to interpret the synagogue findings, some more impassioned by the pictures than disciplined in describing and assessing visual material. J.H. Breasted, for instance, wrote a curious book, *Oriental Forerunners of Byzantine Paintings*, based upon a single day’s work at Dura. Relatively few historians of Classical art have commented on the paintings; this seems surprising because Dura was a fortified city under Roman rule in the second century A.D. and a Roman colony during the Severan dynasty, from 211 A.D. The art reflects the city’s expansion and political stability under Roman management. Many of the narrative devices and decorative motives in the synagogue panels are unmistakably Roman; it is also in

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keeping with Roman practice that the benefactors of the synagogue assumed a direct role in the selection, arrangement, and planning of the biblical scenes to fit a definite program. The Roman component in the synagogue's decorative program is the focus of this paper.

Historians of religion have dominated the scholarly literature on the synagogue, from two sharply divergent theological viewpoints. Carl Kraeling assessed the visual material archaeologically and philologically. He carefully described each biblical illustration and stressed the close relationship of the scenes to contemporary rabbinical literature and tradition—in his own words, “the Dura congregation subscribed sincerely to the beliefs and value judgements that are traditional to Judaism and endeavored by the decoration of its House of Assembly to memorialize and inculcate reverence for the historic tradition to which it adhered” (356). According to Kraeling the paintings were intended to make Jewish scriptural tradition visual and relate important incidents, to the congregation, of God's punishment and reward. However, Kraeling has given the art too little chance to speak for itself and for those who commissioned it; its role is seen as subordinate, not equal, to rabbinical literature, as a document of people at a particular place and time.

Kraeling's professional rival and colleague at Yale, Erwin Goodenough explained the paintings as exemplifying, not traditional monotheistic Judaism, but an amalgam of paganism and Judaism, “a Mystic Hellenized Judaism”(IX-XI). Goodenough quite rightly identified Graeco-Roman (i.e. pagan) elements in the paintings but he zealously elevated simple artistic conventions of representation to the level of mystical symbolism and hidden theological meaning. For instance, Pharaoh's daughter, depicted in Classical (pagan) nudity, became the fertility goddess, Anahita, who miraculously rescued the divine babe, Moses. The synagogue paintings, therefore, are not representations of biblical scenes but mystical “interpretations” of Torah. Seen in this light the Jews at Dura were learned and philosophical, but is this probable?

Goodenough has forced the art to speak to his own personal ideological preconceptions, maneuvering far beyond the social and cultural expectations of a small Jewish community on the caravan route. In Late Antiquity, paintings were aimed primarily at those who could not read and in this context Classical (Graeco-Roman) artistic motives served a special narrative purpose, discussed below. Concerning the educational value of images Pope Gregory the Great said, *c.* 600 A.D., “Pictures are used in church so that those who are illiterate may by looking at the walls read there what they are unable to read in books.” This paper is

not about theology or religious history but about the power of visual language and pictorial rhetoric in Late Antique art.

Wall paintings decorated many places of worship at Dura, meeting houses and sacred complexes lined up, almost door-to-door, in the same domestic quarter of this militarized trading post of in eastern Syria. Such houses of religion included a synagogue, a Mithraeum, a Christian baptistery, and sanctuaries of Bel, Adonis, Atargatis, Artemis Azzanath-cona, and another local Artemis, to name only a few. This fortress (a Semitic word, "Dura" means fortress) was obviously cosmopolitan, and a place where religious syncretism flourished. The main caravan route between Seleucia-on-the-Tigris and Antioch-on-the-Orontes, between India, Palmyra, and the Mediterranean ran through the great gate at Dura and down the main street. But, to judge from the physical remains, the community as a whole was not especially wealthy, despite its location on the west bank of the Euphrates.

Dura (Europos as it was called well into the second century A.D. by Greek speakers) had been inhabited in Assyrian times and was re-established c. 300 B.C. by Seleukos I Nikator. It was Parthian from 113 B.C. and Roman briefly in the early second century A.D. Lucius Verus seized control for Rome firmly in A.D. 164 and Dura remained Roman until Shapur I, King of Persia, second ruler of the Sassanian dynasty, destroyed this desert outpost c. 256/257 A.D. The Dura synagogue was located just north of the city gate and its paintings are dated, by inscriptional and numismatic evidence, to this later Roman colonial period, c. 245-256 A.D. (Bellinger 1949; Goldman and Little:283-298).

Though the Romans had control of the site for only three generations (slightly more than 100 years), much in the synagogue paintings is traditionally Roman: aspects of the narrative devices, elements of the settings, visual sources, and the programmatic nature of the paintings themselves. Roman art was the visual *lingua franca* of much of Europe and the Near East; ease of communication, not political allegiance, prompted the Jewish planners to adopt aspects of Roman artistic practice as the basis for their synagogue paintings, particularly since Jewish art, essentially non-representational, had no lengthy figurative tradition of its own. On the other hand, perhaps to garner prestige, some financially successful Iranian merchants built large and elegant houses at Dura that were quite definitely Roman in appearance and decoration (Matheson:24). This paper will identify in the paintings some Graeco-Roman conventions of representation and arrangement which a patron or group of planners manipulated more or less intentionally to facilitate

narrative comprehension and to advertise by way of comparison their own commitment to God and status within the congregation itself.

Reminiscent of Roman commemorative art Moses is depicted near the burning bush (fig. 1) in an attitude of address that recalls the Roman *adlocutio*. In another vignette, the valiant Mordecai is shown in the stately mode of triumphal entry, the *adventus*. It seems more than coincidental that the gate of Egypt through which "Moses in the Migration" has just led the Israelites is fashioned along the lines of a Roman *porta triumphalis*. Like Roman commemorative or historical columns and arches the synagogue paintings read vertically, at least in some instances, and perhaps helically. The abundance and types of staging elements, the lack of visual illusion, and the overall clarity of narration find close parallels in Roman historical reliefs of the second and early third centuries (Hill:1-15; Thompson in Gutmann 1973:37-52; Brilliant 1967:219-224).

The actual presence at Dura of such commemorative monuments has passed largely unnoticed. The triumphal arch erected by Trajan's troops, c. 115-117 A.D., on the desert road west of the city gate, is one of the most important fixed points for the chronology of the city, as Bellinger has proven (Bellinger 1949:204 n. 30). In like manner, Graeco-Roman nudity, it can be argued, reflects the specifically Macedonian and Roman heritage of Dura as well as the general artistic disposition of the hellenized Orient and, as depicted in the synagogue pictures, has both lithic quality and particular sculptural associations. It must be kept in mind, however, that the synagogue at Dura is the first major Jewish artistic monument to have been excavated and its frescoes (tempera on plaster) are the earliest known important display of biblical images, even though the visual and rhetorical language of some of the images seems to have been borrowed from other better established artistic traditions.

There is sufficient evidence to show that the paintings in the synagogue were not decorative but didactic, the focus of instruction and religious debate. Classical schemes, figure types of long-standing cachet, and details of dress or undress had metaphorical significance. In a number of details the synagogue artists were doubtlessly inspired by ad hoc designs from Roman coins, Roman domestic painting, Roman commemorative and historical monuments, and small sculptures of local manufacture. The programmatic nature of the paintings, moreover, is Graeco-Roman. Could there have been available to the synagogue artists another set of visual conventions better suited to Jewish representation than the Roman, more authoritative, widely recognized, highly

visible and therefore more successful for the purposes of instruction? Certainly not. Roman artistic schemes carried for the congregation levels of meaning that were immediately apprehensible, automatic and spontaneous.

Not all scholarly commentators on the synagogue have isolated Romanisms in the frescoes, some because of orthodox national bias, some in defense of the complexities of a hybrid style. Along these lines Richard Brilliant has stated that the paintings of Dura-Europos do not constitute an example of Roman provincial art (in Gutmann 1973:29). I persist in thinking differently. At the preliminary level of art-historical investigation of these frescoes—which has prevailed for nearly sixty years—the semiotic value of the Classical schemes and of the programmatic arrangements of the biblical scenes has not been appreciated. These are the issues which this paper addresses, if only as prolegomenon.

The overall stylistic features of this art are the same throughout the synagogue: frontality, a lack of interest in the human body, shrouding drapery, stereotypical gestures, motionless figures depicted without emotion. The closest stylistic parallels can be found at nearby Palmyra. There are notable exceptions, perhaps the result of prototypes immediately at hand. “Moses near the Burning Bush,” prominently placed, heroically youthful, seems to have been the recipient of extra artistic ambition. The area above the Torah niche, which scholars have conveniently named the *reredos*, is set off by four panel paintings depicting prophets or elders (fig. 2). Goodenough (111) interpreted all four figures as Moses, but Kessler (170-173) has recently demonstrated that the panel on the lower left depicts Isaiah (Isaiah 60:19-21), and Jeremiah is in the lower right, standing beside the covered Ark and displaying the scroll of the new covenant. The draped figure beside the burning bush (the plant is shot with red) is labelled in Aramaic, “Moses son of Levi” (fig. 1). The hand of the Almighty above the shrub emphasizes that God is speaking to Moses, and Moses’ position above the heads of the assembled congregation is in turn in the official Roman attitude of address (Pollini in Moon). Moses has heard the voice of God declaring that the people of Abraham will be rescued from oppression in Egypt and will be delivered to a land of milk and honey (Exodus 3:8). Moses’ gesture relays God’s message to the congregation and prepares us for the Exodus scene immediately to the right of the panel (fig 2). Parenthetically, in the panel below (fig. 3) our attention is drawn to Jeremiah’s (or Moses’) display of God’s revealed word; the scrolls of the Torah, we should realize, were actually housed in the niche to the lower

left of this latter painting. The detail in this panel of the covered or hidden Ark may relate allegorically to the scene of the "Closed Temple" immediately to its right, to be discussed later. Whether or not Moses' gesture toward the burning bush would have suggested to the faithful the authority of the Roman *adlocutio* (Brilliant 1963:122, fig. 3.41) is less important, at this juncture in our narrative, than our recognition of the artist's presentation of Moses as a Classical hero.¹

With squared head and stocky neck and body, Moses' figure continues in many ways the classicizing reinvocation of Greek art that appears with renewed popularity during the reigns of the Antonine and Severan emperors, contemporary, that is, with the synagogue. Moses' body is clearly heroically proportioned, entirely intellectualized and arranged, albeit by provincial artisans, according to Classical schemes. An emphatically rhythmic contrapposto, the pose of "mobile repose," is combined with a subtle mix of ethnic details of beard and dress, which reminded the congregation that they were the heirs to an ancient dignity and a precious contemporary piety. Moses is barefoot; his high-topped shoes are tellingly placed beside the burning bush in a further gesture of piety and traditional reverence. In Roman art as well this is a stock indicator that the hero is on sacred ground; Moses is in the holiest of places (Exodus 3:5). Heroic contrapposto, ideal body type, and other motives functioned in the paintings as moral qualifiers and determinatives. In Graeco-Roman terms "Moses near the Burning Bush" is the epitome, for the congregation, of masculine beauty and legendary strength; Moses is a leader, heroic and pure. Were these artistic determinatives meant to be transferred to the patron(s) who commissioned the synagogue frescoes? Apart from most other paintings in the synagogue, these four panels show awareness of the Classical concept of figure in space, insofar as one sees the elements of horizon line, landscape, and cast shadow.

Draped figures like the first-century boy from Petworth House (fig. 4) are classicizing analogues to our figure of Moses (Wyndham:88-89, no. 55, pl. 55; McCann:170, no. 80, pl. LXXIII). There are virtually hundreds of these *togati*, but few better than the Petworth demonstrate Classical ingredients of chiasmus, weight distribution, head type, and bodily grace. That this Classical configuration quickly became the accepted visual metaphor for Roman public virtue—beginning with Augustus and continuing into Severan times—needs no lengthy discus-

¹ Moses' gesture of *adlocutio* is exactly similar to Trajan's, scene IX, Trajan's Column.

sion here. I offer as a later example another English *togatus*, purportedly of the Emperor Septimius Severus, from Leicester's Holkham Hall, closer in date to our Moses (as restored, fig. 5).² It is enticing to mention here that iconographic references to Septimius and his family (if indeed I am correct in identifying them) will sharply change scholarly interpretation of scenes in the synagogue and the purposes these tableaux served in worship and religious debate. Leaving aside the issue of heroized contrapposto and other classicizing reminiscences, Moses' apparel deserves comment. Do Moses and the Israelites wear the toga (or the pallium), particularly the *toga praetexta*, with its status-bearing border of purple? At first glance this seems to be the case. The heroic pose of Moses on Mount Horeb lends visual authority and legitimacy to his scriptural role. Is this also true of his dress?

The temptation for Jews to affect Roman dress for social expediency seems to have been sufficiently real to have brought about halakhic or legal admonition from Jewish sages: "So that you might not do as they do, causing others to come and destroy you—you should not say, 'Since they go out clad in a toga, so I will go out clad in a toga, since they go out wearing purple, so I will go out wearing purple' " (*Sifra Deuteronomy* 81). The absence of the toga's customary *sinus* and *umbo*, the overfold and so-called knob or gathering of cloth, its short length and close similarity to the Greek *himation* (the Latin *pallium*) do not of themselves disqualify Moses' garment from being a toga. Though there exists wide variety with the toga, by definition it seems always to have been half elliptical in its pattern, with rounded ends (Stone in Sebastia and Bonfante). Quite clearly the corners of Moses' cloak are squared and marked with tassels, an essential element of Jewish legal custom, the *tsitsit*: "You shall make twisted tassels on the four corners of your cloaks which you wrap around you" (Deuteronomy 22:12). *Tsitsit* are tassels of piety; Yahweh told Moses (Numbers 15:37-41): "Speak to the sons of Israel and tell them to put tassels on the hems of their garments, and to put a violet cord on this tassel at the hem. You must have a tassel and the sight of it will remind you of the Commandments of Yahweh." Moses wears a tunic and mantle, the *halug* and the *tallit*, both banded. On the former the stripes are solid, on the latter they are notched, and are limited to the corners only (Yadin:209, 227; Fittschen:179-80). In both, width and color seem to signify status; expectedly, Moses' bands are wide and purple. The origins of Jewish dress, it has been argued,

²I thank Dr. H. Oehlers, the Forschungsarchiv für römische Plastik, University of Cologne, for this photograph and for that of the togate figure of Septimius Severus in Holkham Hall.

are partly Roman in these respects.³ Furthermore, in their architectural framing of the Torah niche, and in details of pose and drapery, the four panels of prophets and of Moses would have brought to the minds of the congregation the statues of Roman *summi viri* displayed in most Roman cities and towns in the niches and porches of prominent buildings.

In Roman official public art, people and objects are depicted in positions and in relationships that conventionally suggested important abstract ideas; anyone, therefore, anywhere in the far-flung Roman world, could understand at an instant the essential meaning of what might otherwise have been impenetrable narrative for citizens of diverse ethnic background. The Purim story of the exaltation of Mordecai and the subsequent salvation of Babylonian Jews is an artistic case in point; it appears on the west wall of the synagogue, just to the left of the Torah niche (fig. 6). In Esther (6:6-10), the Persian king Artaxerxes seeks to ascertain covertly from Haman how best to honor whoever has served the throne most loyally. The reply itself suggested the Roman artistic convention for regal comings and goings (the *adventus*): "Have robes brought which the King has worn, and a horse which the king has ridden; the man to be honored should be given them, a diadem put on his head, and the noblest of the king's men should lead him through the city square." Mordecai is dressed in the Persian king's own regal Iranian robes as the biblical text describes; the pose in which he is cast, however flattened by the provincial artist, is traditionally Roman. The Roman imperial *adventus* or triumphal entry into a city appears on coins and medals from the reign of Septimius Severus; several examples have been preserved in coin hoards excavated at Dura (Bellinger 1952:63, no. 60, pl. XIII). The emperor on horseback may ride alone or, like the equestrian Mordecai, may be preceded by a cursor (fig. 7), often depicted turning around to check the triumphal progress. The procession is sometimes followed by a *pedisequus* gesturing vigorously—like the Jews in front of Mordecai—in welcome and salute (Brilliant 1963:174-75, figs. 4.23-4.34; Grabar:125, figs. 300-302).

For their own ends, the synagogue artists drew inspiration from coin types, and the congregation, familiar with these coins, automatically

³Contemporary formal Jewish attire—not the Greek himation, not the Roman toga—is conveyed by the combination of these features, as the archaeological evidence itself suggests (Yadin:209; Roussin in Sebesta and Bonfante). Could the synagogue artists, probably not Jews themselves, have mistakenly given the holy men of Baal the same costume (without tsitsit)? The loose-fitting oriental trousers, more frequently depicted in the paintings, seem to have been standard, day-to-day dress in a desert climate and appear in the synagogue in both Jewish and non-Jewish narrative contexts, for those of status and not.

superimposed overtones of triumph, victory, and virtue onto the story of Mordecai and the Jews. We should note that further east on the caravan route, contemporary with the synagogue paintings, the same coin motif of the *adventus* or *profectio Augusti* seems to have influenced the depiction of the Buddha at Gandhara (Buchthal:12-14, figs. 25-27). In the imperial cult the triumphal entry may have also carried the spiritual implication that the emperor was “bringer of peace”; in fact, this *virtus adventus* also appears as a coin type of Septimius Severus (Brilliant 1963:175; Buchthal:14). Such virtuous modification even better describes the spiritual component in the triumphal entry of Mordecai, the Buddha, and the Christ on Palm Sunday. Not coincidentally, at Dura the deity Hadad or Asheru is also represented in *adventus* (fig. 8) (S. Downey:57-60); indeed, Persian and Parthian art may have borrowed the *adventus* type from Roman tradition.

Pharaoh's daughter as she rises from the Nile nude, her pudenda clearly visible, appears low on the synagogue wall, close to the Torah niche; she must have seemed a shameless image even to a hellenized Jew living in this garrison town in eastern Syria (fig. 9). Any pictures whatsoever, regardless of subject matter, seem out of place in a synagogue, given the prohibitions of the Second Commandment. At least one passage in the Jerusalem Talmud does tolerate the use of images,⁴ perhaps for teaching purposes; however, when it come to nudity, the Mishnah, a second-century A.D. corpus of traditional post-biblical Jewish law, both cultural and religious, is repeatedly and most emphatically explicit about covering the body.⁵ Female or male, nudity is a costume whose purpose in the synagogue frescoes must surely have been didactic—particularly in light of such strong prohibitions—and whose immediate artistic prototypes are to be sought in local sculptures in the Graeco-Roman tradition, as we shall see.

⁴*Abordah Zarah* 48 d *Jerusalem Talmud*, “In the days of Rabbi Jochanan men began to paint pictures on the walls (c. 250 A.D.) and he did not hinder them.” “In the days of Rabbi Abbún men began to make designs on mosaics and he did not hinder them” (*Targum Pseudo Johanathan* [cf. Lev 26]). “But a stone column carved with images and likenesses you may make upon the premises of your sanctuaries but not to worship them” (*apud* Kraeling:344). See Avi-Yonah.

⁵*Mishnah Sotah* 1:15; *Tosefta Sotah* 3:4; *Mishnah Avodah Zarah* 3:4; *Mishnah Moed Quatan* 3:7; *Genesis* 37:34. Nudity most often connotes a state of shame. The body may be uncovered while swimming (*Mishnah Avodah Zarah* 3:4), but this could hardly justify the brazen frontality of Pharaoh's daughter. For the ritual bath, see T. and M. Metzger (75, fig. 106): “The immersion of proselytes also took place there (*migwe*) during the ceremony of conversion.” On Pharaoh's daughter naked in the Nile, see Gutmann (1978:61, fig. 11). The princess' jewelry, however, would negate, as would the child, any association with the ritual bath (*migwe*), for which a woman must be unadorned. My thanks to Rabbis Mordechai Simon and Jan Brahm.

In artistic vocabulary, water and female frontality had long been iconographic complements of generative, reproductive forces, since the Knidian Aphrodite, the Aphrodite Anadyomene and earlier; Aphrodite indeed may have been the inspiration behind the depiction of Pharaoh's daughter in the Nile. Several molded plaster plaques of Aphrodite at her toilette, which rather closely resemble the figure of the princess, were excavated from houses at Dura, not far from the synagogue itself (fig. 10). Concerning the Aphrodite plaque shown here the excavator has said, "There can be little doubt that the Venus of the plaques was the tutelary divinity of a guild of entertainers and prostitutes" (S. Downey: 162-164, 164-150, 313, 40-41, No. 21; Dorigo: fig. 5). For members of the congregation the frontal nudity of Pharaoh's daughter must have had risqué connotation; the bulla or pendant between her breasts emphasizes fertility and recalls the jewelry of the oriental Aphrodite or Astarte. Were these Aphrodite plaques the immediate sculptural prototypes for the representation of Pharaoh's daughter? Be that as it may, the artist has gone out of his way to depict and emphasize the princess's sexuality, and this scene of the Nile may have carried added local appeal for the Dura community, situated as it was on a mesa overlooking the Euphrates.

Theologians have explained the princess's nudity with passages in contemporary rabbinical texts which recount that the princess, suffering from leprosy, went down to bathe in the Nile and was miraculously cured of her affliction when she touched the basket containing Moses (*Tanhuma Shenot* 7). Later tradition added that the princess was converted to Judaism (*Bavli Megillah* 13a; *Sotah* 12b). According to Jewish tradition Pharaoh's daughter was called Bityah, "daughter of God," insofar as she left the Egyptian gods of her father. And the congregation of Jews indeed may have known these popular variants of the biblical story. The erotic nudity in the synagogue painting seems to have meant that Pharaoh's daughter was *not—or at least not yet—a Jew*; in keeping with this, for instance, we read in Leviticus 19:29, "Do not profane your daughter by making her a harlot," and in Deuteronomy 24:17, "There shall be no harlots of the daughters of Israel" (see footnote 4). The princess' shapely, sculptural body serves a specific narrative function, for it contrasts sharply with the heavily attired women on the shore who receive the infant, and who are, doubtless, Jochebed and Miriam, the mother and sister of Moses. Their veiled heads and enveloping colored garments, which accord with scripture and tradition, seem authentically Jewish. These two women and others depicted in the synagogue frescoes wear pink, brown, beige, and beige-yellow—not white, forbidden

by the Mishnah. White, we should explain, was exclusive to men, especially to those of status, as the figures of Moses and others in the frescoes attest. A comment by Rabbi Nathan ben Joseph suggests that colored garments were ordained for women in order to camouflage their menstrual stains; colored clothing was, moreover, also thought to be more pleasing to men (*Sifra Deuteronomy* 115b; *BT, Nidda* 61b; Roussin; Shapero. The antithesis between the juxtaposed dress and undress seems purposeful and rhetorical.

Jewish women were required to cover the head. In the Bavli (the Babylonian Talmud) a woman may be divorced without payment of her marriage contract if she goes in public with uncovered hair: "And what is deemed to be a wife's transgression against Jewish practice? Going out with an uncovered head" (Numbers 5:18; *BT, Ketuboth* 72b, *apud* Roussin:11-58; Thompson 1988:99-115). Tertullian (*De corona militis IV*), writing in Carthage c. 211 A.D., says, "Among the Jews it is so common for their women to have the head veiled that this is the means by which they can be recognized." The famous bronze sestertius issued by the Emperor Vespasian, "Judea Capta," bears on the reverse a female personification of the Jewish people, her head characteristically veiled (fig. 11) (Vermeule 1981; Stone 1985:378-91; Smith 1988a:70-71, 55, no. 9, pl. VIII 5; Smith 1987:95-6, notes 21-24).

Nakedness again seems to signal *non-Jewishness*, this time in the scene of "Moses Leading the Migrations from Egypt" (fig. 12), which narrative is separated from "Moses' Rescue from the Nile" by a single register or pictorial band. The Egyptian hosts are not only depicted armed, as in the biblical story, but are also cast as Rabbi Nathan describes them in *Esther Rabbah* (3:14): "The Egyptians who sank in the sea were punished naked." A passage from *Eliyahu Rabbah* (1:2) may echo this: "God punishes the wicked naked." The Israelites are led by a Herculean Moses whose arm is raised in an attitude of smiting, which is at once recognizable language for a Hittite, Egyptian, or Classical tough-guy.⁶ Moses, as mentioned, epitomizes a leader of legendary proportion and definition. The Israelites, dressed in tunics and lightly armed, are shown quitting Egypt, which is represented as a walled city with open gates. Exactly the same artistic abbreviation for Egypt

⁶Moses wields a club and to some he recalls Herakles because of this. According to Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* XII) Abraham had two sons by his second wife Katura and they fought with Herakles against Busiris in Africa; one of the sons married a daughter of Herakles. The club could hardly mean that Moses is Herakles in disguise. "The visual language tells us, however, that he performed great deeds like a pagan strongman."

appears in the register below, in the story of Moses' recovery from the Nile.

The painters and planners of the synagogue frescoes paid special attention to certain details of dress and gesture, among other elements, mindful on the one hand of traditional Jewish practice and legal admonition while on the other schooled in Roman artistic language and conventions of representation. The *tsitsit* or tassels of piety, the covering of a woman's head, her colored garments, the restricted use of white, and the banding and other markings on men's clothing reflect traditional Jewish wisdom, as the Mishnah and other sources corroborate.

In this context, the use of nudity in the synagogue panels must surely have been intentionally iconographic, the more so considering the traditional prohibitions surrounding it. If one accepts this possibility, nudity depicted on the central doors of the so-called Closed Temple or Solomon's Temple forces a reinterpretation of this elaborate temple scene, discussed below, and in doing so provides new insight into the narrative interrelationship of several scenes and cycles in the synagogue program. The arrangement of the panels, much like the juxtaposition of dress and nudity in the painting of Pharaoh's daughter, was deliberate and rhetorical. In the tiers of scenes to the right of the Torah niche the artist has arranged vertically symbols of wickedness and enslavement. The portals of Egypt in two panels bracket the toppling of the idols of Dagon, another story, like those of Egypt, that conveys bondage. This didactic alignment recalls the similar practice in Roman art of grouping thematically cycles whose stores at first glance are otherwise unrelated.

The portal of Egypt through which Moses has just led his people is Roman in its iconographic emblems of Empire. It is the *porta triumphalis* (fig. 13). Winged Victories, as we see them here, lightly perched on globes, are the familiar Roman symbol for world dominion; Mars, carrying orb and spear, completes the triumphal message (Brilliant 1967:219-224). This statue of Mars, which is cast in strong Classical stance, wears only a helmet; we remember that, from a Jewish point of view, nudity is pagan. Goodenough and others have understood the figure of Mars between Victories as divinely prophetic of Israel's impending success.⁷ The nude Roman god of war, however, would have unhappily reminded the Jews of oppression, Roman domination and despoliation, the obligatory ruler cult, and cuirassed generals. In the context of the narrative of biblical Egypt, this is surely what the Jews

⁷It should be mentioned that no women flee Egypt. Men and children are depicted in the numbers of Israelites but no women.

were leaving behind. The scholarly historiography surrounding the synagogue paintings is too vast to be rehearsed here; suffice it to say that Goodenough and his adherents have overinterpreted individual motives and have laboriously searched for mystical meaning far beyond the obvious.

The scenes from the Exodus (13:17-14:29) that follow the portals of Egypt are confused, or at least conflate the sequence of events and certain details. "Moses after he had gone out from Egypt and cleft the sea" is inscribed in Aramaic near that giant of a man who is leading his people to the promised land. The actual parting of the Red Sea, rather unexpectedly, has been left out, perhaps for narrative economy. Still, the drowning of the Egyptians as seen at Dura seems to precede the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites; the twelve tribes are depicted on the extreme left, armed and unarmed, having been delivered by Moses, whose name is again inscribed. These vignettes scholars see as excerpts from illuminated manuscripts, from Hellenistic Octateuchs and Pentateuchs or Late Antique Targumim and Midrashim (Narkiss:367-68; Weitzmann and Kessler). It seems unlikely, however, that such scenes were taken from a manuscript tradition, where the narrative sequence would have been guaranteed by the accompanying text. Instead, I propose that the synagogue paintings derive from a more popular tradition, from sets or series of hand-held pinakes or placards, which may have been used by a *meturgeman* as he paraphrased the Torah and other lessons for a Jewish community that was multi-lingual but, probably, scarcely familiar with Hebrew.⁸ Compositional aspects within the scenes themselves and the repetition of the main character, frame to frame, suggest placards; these stylistic features are preserved on placards from other later art-historical traditions (*infra* p.).

Two pairs of large panels prominently placed on either side and slightly above the Torah niche may be related programmatically, and exemplify the rhetorical arrangement and didactic juxtaposition of scenes to which we have already alluded. The two on the left of the Torah shrine, "Moses and the Miraculous Well in the Wilderness" and the "Ark in the Sanctuary of Aaron" were probably meant to have been read as a complementary unit (figs. 14 & 15). The Menorah is centrally placed in each panel and symbolizes the presence of the Almighty. The twelve streams emanating from the well and winding to twelve tents, on

⁸The *meturgeman* is a person who, in the first few centuries of the common era, was designated to provide oral translation of a Scripture passage after that passage had been read in a synagogue worship service.

the one hand, record divine custody if the tribes of Israel; in like manner the Ark in Aaron's sanctuary (Aaron is identified in Greek) demonstrates God's covenant with these tribes. Weitzmann has shown in the story of the Well that the tabernacle is depicted architecturally and in this respect was intended to be paired with the temple of Aaron (Weitzmann and Kessler:66-67).

The other two panels further along in the same register, on the opposite side of the Torah niche (figs. 16 & 17), are likewise complementary and were doubtless meant to be contrasted with the pair just described. They too are both "temple scenes." One scene, the so-called Closed Temple, "Heavenly Temple," or "Solomon's Temple," has been generally misidentified as Jewish.⁹ Nudity, which is blatantly depicted on the central doors, again seems to convey that the temple is *not Jewish*, particularly since the pagan scene juxtaposed depicts 1 Samuel 5, the Ark of the Covenant topping the idol of Dagon, the god of the Philistines, before that god's very own temple. The scenes perhaps should be taken as a pair of episodes in the same biblical narrative, which has as its lesson the might of the God of Israel over all other deities. The pair together better conforms to other biblical scenes in the synagogue, which either focus on the conflicts between Jews and non-Jews, in which God helps the Jews triumph over the pagans, or on examples of God's power. Such scenes, we might add, must have reassured the Dura Jews of God's protection—surrounded as they were by alien peoples and pagan shrines—and have instilled in them special fear, should they be tempted to abandon their covenant with Yahweh.

In one instance the viewer is outside the tiled, multi-colored precinct wall of an eastern temple whose doors are closed. In the companion scene the viewer is inside the same precinct enclosure, before the temple's facade, where God's vengeance has been twice visited. The bibli-

⁹Weitzmann identify the temple as "The Walls and the Temple of Jerusalem" (2 Samuel 5:9 and 1 Kings 6). There are not seven walls but a tiled precinct wall of several colors, which typifies Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian architecture: "scintillating walls in enameled and intricately patterned bricks" (Oppenheim:324). Compare the muted dressed stones of Aaron's temple, which better conforms to the biblical narrative. Along with the nudity depicted on the doors, with the references to idolatrous ruler cults, is not the artist's use of color another indication that the temple is *not Jewish*? Des Mesnil du Buisson believed that this is the Temple of the Sun at Bethshemesh (1 Samuel 6: 12-21) (83ff.). Is it not wiser to see this as the Temple of Dagon at Ashdod (1 Samuel 5), which is essential to the narrative in Samuel and directly related to the scene next to it and to the Battle of Eben Ezer, which continues the narrative cycle in the band on the north wall? Jonathan Goldstein (217) suggests that the "Closed Temple" is the only panel in this zone in which the ark does not appear. The ark is understood as present, however, hidden inside the closed precinct wall; see 1 Samuel 5:2-3.

cal story (1 Samuel 5) begins with the Philistines stealing the Ark of the Covenant and hiding it in their temple (the "Closed Temple"), from which the Ark is finally set free, after having toppled Dagon's cult statue on two successive days. In the panel of the prophet Jeremiah to the left of the "Closed Temple," the detail of the covered or hidden Ark, though from an entirely different narrative context, prefigures the theme of hiding and triumphant restoration central to the Dagon story; it reinforces our identification of the "Closed Temple" as Philistine. Jeremiah himself had once hidden the Ark, this time in a cave, until that day when God's mercy and promise to his people would be reaffirmed, newly proclaimed and Jerusalem restored (Weitzmann and Kessler:119-28). It should be noted that another episode from the "Dagon cycle," the "Battle of Eben Ezer," in which the Ark is initially captured by the Philistines, is in the same pictorial band as the "Closed Temple" and the "Toppling of the Idol of Dagon," mentioned below.

On opposite sides of the Torah niche *two pairs* of temple scenes have been contrasted; the persistence and vitality of God's covenant with Israel is the common theme of both pairs. I use the term "programmatic" to describe just such deliberate, meaningful relationships between two or more paintings for the purposes of instruction, having one or several levels of meaning (M. L. Thompson:36-77).¹⁰ The assortment of colored backgrounds of the panels may have given clues for such narrative associations, or may have indicated to the *meturgeman* the order in which one or a group of hand-held placards was to be shown to the congregation (*Mishnah Megillah* 44, 46, 49).

The two central doors of the "Closed Temple" depict in mirror image in squared frames on each door: a humped bull (of Mithras?); a nude male standing exaggerated contrapposto between two smaller similarly nude figures; a woman wearing a *modius* and carrying both a cornucopia and an implement that looks like a rudder (fig. 18). The tall nude male wears a low *modius* or fertility cap and a crown of vine leaves and the companion junior figures have as attributes a star over the head. The ensemble seems to suggest either oriental Jupiter, Liber, or Serapis in the company of the young Dioscuri. All of these deities are commonly represented as coin and gem types during the reign of Septimius

¹⁰ Judaic scholars have misinterpreted the term "programmatic," insisting that all the paintings in the Synagogue interrelate in a single coherent ideological or theological program. They thereby fail to note meaningful relationships between two or more paintings or groups of paintings to promote the patron in a variety of civic or religious settings, as was typically the case in antiquity. See additional references, p. 606.

Severus (McCann:51-55). The obvious conclusion is, therefore, that the pagan imagery on the temple doors advertises the pagan nature of the worship inside.

Hoard IV from Dura has examples of two denarii whose reverses display a nude Septimius as Jupiter holding thunderbolt and scepter, standing between the infants Geta and Caracalla as the Dioscuri (fig. 19) (Bellinger 1952:pl. XV, nos. 105-106). The obverses have a laureate bust of Septimius to the right. Severan coinage includes another reverse type of Jupiter with the *modius* of Serapis (McCann:54-55). Correspondingly, a gem found in a church yard at Castlesteads, Cumberland (now lost) shows a bust of Septimius Severus as the Egyptian god Serapis between his two sons Geta and Caracalla as the Dioscuri, with the telltale star above each of the boys' heads (fig. 20) (McCann:55). The synagogue artist took his inspiration for the nude triad on the doors directly from numismatic art, as we have indicated in discussing the *adventus* of Mordecai. Except for the depictions of children and others for whom nakedness is a natural state (the baby Moses, the widow's child, Ezekiel's souls), all other instances of nudity in the frescoes imply that the subject is *not Jewish*. Further proof of borrowing from coins is found in the figures of Tyche or Fortuna, which appear at the bottom of each of the doors of the "Closed Temple"; not coincidentally, Fortuna, wearing the *modius* and carrying a cornucopia and rudder, is a familiar Severan coin design and one that is well documented from the Dura coin hoards (Bellinger 1949:nos. 943, 1060). Such near contemporary references diminish even further the likelihood of the Dura artists' dependence on illuminated manuscripts from the Hellenistic period as the primary source of artistic inspiration.

Jupiter/Serapis in Classical nudity on the doors repeats the pose of the Mars over the portal of Egypt in the register above. The raised right hand, exaggerated pose, and other details have led some scholars, in discussing the Mars, to reconstruct as its sculptural prototype the fourth-century B.C. Alexander with Spear by Lysippos (Kraeling:77). Whether Post-Classical or Hellenistic, such artistic prototypes as the Lysippos have been advanced as internal proof of the subsequent influence on the synagogue paintings by earlier Hellenistic illuminated manuscripts. The same holds true for the conventional motif of the so-called butterfly wings, discussed below.

It is already the *romanized* Classical, the *romanized* Hellenistic, which we see reflected in the Dura paintings. Instead of the "Alexander with Spear," the very existence of which has recently been called into question (Smith 1988b:62), the Mars better recalls the long-established ruler

cult portraits, which enjoyed renewed popularity during the Severan dynasty. This becomes clear by comparing the pose and attitude of the later Hellenistic ruler portrait in the Shelby White and Leon Levy collection (fig. 21) with a large-scale bronze from southeastern Turkey that dates to the Severan period and is thought by many scholars to be a statue of Septimius himself (fig. 22) (Vermeule 1968:300, 309, figs. 156, 164). In the synagogue paintings, the Mars in the Exodus scene and the Jupiter/Serapis on the doors of the "Closed Temple" repeat *this pose of idolatrous ruler cult*. We observe that the cult statues of Dagon have the hand raised like that of the Roman divine ruler. In the praetorium of Dura, the excavator has reconstructed monumental cult images of Geta and Caracalla (S. Downey:149, E7); at Dura the military were required to worship the deified members of the Imperial family (Matheson:31). It goes without saying that the notion of Roman imperial divinity was abhorrent to the Jews and, perhaps by way of political innuendo on the doors of the "Closed Temple," the Jews may have hinted that the idols of Rome, like the statue of Dagon in the neighboring frame, would soon come tumbling down; the Persians just over the city walls were well-known for their religious toleration, which we have seen reflected in the story of the "Purim Triumph of Mordecai" on the opposite side of the Torah niche.

Besides the motives reviewed thus far, the more technical aspects in the synagogue paintings—the division of the wall, the didactic effect of the placement of the scenes, the vertical and helical movement of the narratives, register to register, wall to wall—are all quite expectedly rooted in Roman artistic practice. The "surrounds" (ornamental framing motives) of the individual panels and minor details from the utilitarian or decorative arts, like the basket for the babe Moses (compare the casket from the Esquiline treasure), are all direct borrowings from Roman artistic practice. So too are the placards to which I have alluded. The manipulation of conventional schemes and pictorial association is so powerful that there surely was a "master planner" behind the renovation of the synagogue's assembly hall, c. 245 A.D., as Goodenough suggested. It is unlikely, however, that the planner or patron was a "philosopher" or that the congregation, somewhat transient, was composed of profoundly "mystical" Jews (Goldstein:217). The iconographic effects of patronage we will discuss later.

One panel in the continuing register on the adjacent north wall is agreed to represent the "Battle of Eben-Ezer" (1 Samuel 5), at which, as we have remarked, the Philistines defeated the Israelites and captured the Ark (fig. 23). Such narrative movement from wall to wall occurs not

only in this story but also in other biblical cycles from the synagogue, most prominently that of the Prophet Elijah, where the episode of the "Widow's Child" appears on the main west wall, and the companion episodes (1 Kings 17-18), the "Prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel," "Elijah at Cherith and Zarephath," and "Elijah's Sacrifice," are located on the south, again in the same adjacent pictorial band (fig. 24). Roman commemorative artistic tradition may lie behind this helical wrapping of scenes, which includes fascinating narrative consequences, which seem, again, intentionally programmatic. "Elijah Raising the Widow's Child" (fig. 25) is positioned on the west wall, antiphonally in the same register, at opposite ends of the pictorial band, from the story of "Moses' Rescue From The Nile" (fig. 9). Goodenough himself remarked the antithesis of the two babies, though his archetypal interpretation as "divine children" seems unnecessarily contrived and far-fetched (227-237). Instead, in one scene Elijah, a Jew, comes to the aid of the widow and her child, who are from Sidon and therefore not Jews. In the latter Pharaoh's daughter, a non-Jewish Egyptian princess, assists the babe Moses and so the whole Jewish nation. The background color of each of the two corresponding panels is red and, just possibly, color signalled that the panels were complementary. Later Jewish tradition again held that the widow, whose breast is bared in mourning, was converted to Judaism, thereby establishing another parallel with Pharaoh's daughter (*supra* p. 595).

Such moralizing antitheses in Roman painting have recently been clarified by Professor Ling, among others (Ling:773-816). By the Late Antique, Old and New Testament scenes were depicted antiphonally, for example, in the Christian baptistery at Dura, which is located in the same city neighborhood as the synagogue. Should we not appreciate all the more the presence of rhetorical contrasts in the synagogue paintings themselves? Paulinus of Nola, c. 400 A.D., later and many miles from Dura, nonetheless justifies the use of images and the allegorical method of interpreting them for the purposes of instructing the uneducated; he says, "The majority of the people who look at these paintings are not devoid of religion, but are simply not able to read" (Davis-Weyer:17-23). Describing contrasting scenes in his church at Nola, Paulinus firmly establishes the educational benefit of pictures by pairing depictions of Ruth and Orpah (*Ruth* I: 6-12): "Ruth follows her holy relative, though Orpah abandons hers; one daughter-in-law gives testimony of faithlessness, the other remains faith-abiding, one places God above country, the other country above life" (Davis-Weyer:18). Paulinus has chosen this example because Ruth readily provides an example of bibli-

cal conversion; Ruth accepts the God of Israel and is converted to Judaism. Contemporary with Paulinus in the early fifth century are the forty-eight quatrains of Prudentius' *Tituli Historiarum (Dittochaeon)*, which also set Old Testament stories against New for rhetorical and didactic enrichment.¹¹

The synagogue panels seem, as a whole, to present a repertoire of the great figures of Jewish history: the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob with their sons and grandsons; such kings and leaders as Moses, Aaron, Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon; popular prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, and Ezekiel. Understandably in a Syrian setting, the paintings illustrate important events and people of the Babylonian exile: Esther and Mordecai and Ezekiel. Scenes such as these must have had for the congregation the impact of local history, and perhaps in this light the panel of "Samuel Anointing David" (fig. 26) (inscribed in Aramaic) may have suggested the patron or group of elders who commissioned the paintings in the assembly hall and who paid for the remodelling of the synagogue building itself, c. 245 A.D.

The scene of "Samuel Anointing David" is most conspicuous, located beside the Torah niche, with the elder's seat directly beneath (fig. 27). "Samuel, son of Idaeus, elder of the Jews, built this." "Samuel, son of Sapharas, may he be remembered; he built the building as you see it." Whichever of these elders of like name sat in the elder's seat beside the shrine, his honor would have been spiritually heightened by the presence of his biblical namesake on the wall behind, physically, at least, above him. In the story of the anointing of David, the biblical Samuel served as a conduit through whom God spoke to his people, and Samuel the elder allegorically doubtless assumed the same preeminence with respect to his Jewish community at Dura. Green is the background color both for the anointing scene and for the panel with Mordecai and Esther (fig. 6) on the opposite side of the Torah niche. It is, therefore, reasonable to equate Samuel, the protector and bulwark of his Durene congregation in Syria, with the biblical Esther and Mordecai, who saved the Jews from foreign peril in Babylonia. The antiphonal placement of

¹¹The force of Prudentius' many adverbs of place may indicate that his quatrains were meant as accompaniment to visual material. It is interesting to note that in several picture-storytelling traditions short descriptive poems were placed on the backs of hand-held placards and scrolls; see Mair (especially 114). Such poems must have been intended as a reminder that these were essential details and parts of the oral narration that were not to be tampered with or elaborated upon and in verse they were easily memorized to give structure to the narration for the person delivering the sermon.

the panels and the coding of the background colors, at least in certain instances, seems to have been intentional and didactic.

The two antithetical scenes of the widow of Sidon and of Pharaoh's daughter (see footnote 4), both of whom, tradition held, became converts to Judaism, may also relate allegorically to Samuel: the epithet of proselyte or convert follows Samuel's name in what is (admittedly) a corrupt inscription (Goodenough:56).¹² In addition, the seat of the elder in a synagogue is often called the "seat of Moses," which metaphorically would relate Moses and Samuel and the scenes in which they appear. If we follow this reasoning, the viewer is meant to observe that the figures of Moses and that of Samuel—on the same west wall—are big, even dramatically outsized, according to the ancient convention for differentiating status. If we assume that this is a compliment to a patron, then we may also note that on this same wall the cycle of David and that of the Ark in captivity (already discussed) are both drawn from the two books of *Samuel*. Scenes from these two books also appear on other walls. One must wonder, moreover, whether it is merely fortuitous that, on the wall behind the elder's seat, four separate throne scenes are depicted. Such scenes do not appear elsewhere in the synagogue, at least as we can presently reconstruct it.

Iconographic references complimenting a patron's generosity were expected practice in the planning and designing of artistic programs in antiquity, with long-standing roots in Roman tradition. We have seen from Roman coins and sculpture, for instance, that the Emperor's divine associations, his virtues as a leader and benefactor of his people, were openly acknowledged, and such propagandizing—the practice fine-tuned by Augustus—established the precedent among the provincial bourgeoisie that art was a vehicle to advertise a patron's commitment to community or congregation. The late Kathleen Shelton, among others, has demonstrated the effects that patronage exerted as an organizing principle for artistic programs—on whatever scale—in Late Antiquity (Shelton).

The thrones of Solomon (whose name in Greek is misspelled) (fig. 28), David, and Ahasuerus (Artaxerxes) are adorned with what seem to be small-scale, classically-inherited sculptures of eagles and lions.¹³

¹²The dedicatory inscription is translated but not reproduced. Certainly one of the several donors was a convert. Though the epithet, 'proselyte,' appears next to Samuel Sapharas, there is a remote possibility that it qualified another whose name, because of the poor archaeological preservation, has been lost.

¹³Kraeling and Weitzmann both cite a passage in the *Targum Sheni* that indeed says that Ahasue-

Though their placement, decorative effects, and diminutive size seem unusual enough for comment, lions and eagles as images of power and regality had long been commonplace across time and geography. It may be worth mentioning, in the remote possibility of local artistic inspiration on the synagogue paintings, an unruly series of small-scale sculptures in plaster, alabaster, and crystalline gypsum, some excavated in private houses and some in sacred precincts at Dura. These sculptures of eagles and lions are similar in pose and definition to those on the steps of the thrones just listed (figs. 29 and 30). Those animals enchanted by David's music, in the sections of the *reredos* above the Torah niche, also belong to this menagerie.¹⁴ Significantly or not, the throne of Pharaoh, on the same west wall, has received no such embellishment.

A pink plaster eagle—an odd color for the military—has been found in what has been identified as a Roman legionary barracks, and another, also gaily painted, comes from the sanctuary of Jupiter Dolichenus; several others have been recovered from private or possibly military quarters in the city (S. Downey:137-38, nos. 163-68, especially no. 165). About such eagles (fig. 31) and related small sculptures, which were by no means rare in the Roman East and elsewhere, Cornelius Vermeule has written, "Special cults and religious observances helped to provide the different legions of the Roman army with a sense of their own history and importance" (1976:no. 68, 52). Each new recruit learned the narrative of his legion's battles; small sculptures were insignia or awards

rus was in possession of Solomon's throne and that this tradition might account for the similarities of the two thrones as depicted in the synagogue frescoes (Weitzmann and Kessler:115).

¹⁴"David Playing the Lyre" has reminded many scholars of the classical Orpheus charming the beasts, the prophetic nature of Orpheus, therefore, accruing to the young David. This opens the dicey question of Messianism, which will be discussed in a fuller study of the synagogue co-authored by myself and Professor Paul V. M. Flesher. A checklist of aspects of Messianism (Schürer: Vol. 2; 488-54, 514) exposes problems with Messianic interpretation in the synagogue paintings; one cannot find proof in the paintings of the final ordeal and confusion, Elijah as precursor, the coming of the Messiah, the last assault of hostile powers, destruction of future hostile powers, the renewal of Jerusalem, the gathering of the Jews in Diaspora, the kingdom of glory in the Holy Land, the renewal of the world, or the general resurrection. It is possible that the Ezekiel cycle could be interpreted as resurrection and judgment. Kessler rightly dismisses the Orpheus convention as a reference for Messianism (Weitzmann and Kessler: 168-169). Kessler does make the strongest case, however, for Messianic interpretation in the current art-historical literature (153-83). Scholars of Jewish religion, it should be noted, are by no means agreed that during the period of Formative Judaism the belief in the Messiah does not inform all types of Judaism (Neusner 1988; Neusner, Green, and Frerichs). That Esther was important to the Jews at Dura had more to do with local history as an analogy to the role of Samuel as protector of his community than with any conscious Zoroastrian component in their religious ardor; for Iranian religious aspects at Dura see Russell.

that were proudly displayed by the legionaires. Motives from many other sculptures, again largely from domestic settings at Dura, find echoes, maybe not by chance, in certain of the synagogue paintings.

The seemingly original use of the hand of God, which instructs "Moses at the Burning Bush," which guided "Moses and the Migrations from Egypt," and which is upon Ezekiel in the "Raising of the Dry Bones" (fig. 32), appears life-size on a gypsum relief excavated from the entrance hall of a private residence at Dura (fig. 33). It has been suggested that this hand was an abstract symbol of Hadad that was displayed to protect the house from evil (S. Downey:146-47, no. 179). Other small sculptures from Dura correspond in certain details to elements in the synagogue paintings. The reclining pose of Elijah (fig. 25) is similar to the figure of a reclining "aquatic deity" on a relief excavated not far from the synagogue (fig. 34). This "deity" holds in his right hand a plant of the same species as the burning bush in God's revelation to Moses. In the story of the Purim triumph Esther wears a tall crown that looks suspiciously like the "wall and battlement" headdress (fig. 6), which is an emblem of Tyche, the ancient goddess of luck. Like the biblical Esther, Tyche was "protector of the people." At Dura the divine Atargatis sports a similar crown (fig. 35); Tyche too is well represented in the city (Downey:151).¹⁵ Is it not realistic for us to assume that the Dura artists in a number of instances availed themselves of handy symbols, tried and true, appropriating them from whatever ad hoc context—coins, sculpture—in an effort to satisfy exigencies of communication and design?

Butterfly wings, which on the north wall of the synagogue help to define the Psychai or Pneumata (fig. 32) in the narrative band of "Ezekiel and the Dry Bones," are so characteristic of Hellenistic reliefs that this detail, almost by itself, has been put forth as proof that the ultimate source of this cycle is to be found in Hellenistic illuminated manuscripts (Sedrajna). Butterfly wings, the design clearly *rétardataire*, recur on Late Antique (third and fourth-century) grave stelai from Asia Minor and elsewhere (Merkelbach:129, no. 54). Through the kindness of Nancy Ramage, I show as an example an unpublished provincial stele from Ödemiş, in eastern Turkey (figs. 36 a & b).

In the panel of the "Prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel," also called the "Failure of the Sacrifice to Baal" (fig. 24), essential elements of the design, namely the diminutive figure of the nefarious Hiel and the omi-

¹⁵The northeast room of the north tower of the Palmyrene Gate apparently housed a shrine of Tyche, among other depictions.

nous serpent that slithers up to destroy him, may very well have been borrowed for artistic convenience from Roman domestic painting, particularly from Roman painted *lararia*. In order to establish the supremacy of his god, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to beseech their god to light his own sacrificial fires, without human agency; as his end of the bargain, Elijah prays to Yahweh, God of Israel, to do the same. To ensure the outcome the wicked king Ahab enlisted Hiel to hide behind Baal's altar and kindle the sacrificial flames by ordinary means. The plot is spoiled when the God of Israel sends a giant serpent to eliminate Hiel, whose name (in Aramaic) is inscribed twice. Good-enough has provided the ideal illustration of a Roman *lararium*, with serpent and diminutive figure exactly parallel to details in the vignette of the "Prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel" (fig. 37) (11, 137, fig. 117). In his discussion of the Elijah cycle, alas, Goodenough fails to notice any connection with Roman domestic artistic traditions, with which the synagogue artist was surely familiar.

Jewish scholars long have realized that the nefarious Hiel does not figure in the biblical narrative of 1 Kings 17, the story of the "Prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel." He is a figure of *aggadoth*, i.e., folk tales that were transmitted orally or by written sources other than the Bible. Pharaoh's daughter, her leprosy, and her conversion to Judaism, you will recall, may be another instance of folk elaboration (and there are many others in the synagogue frescoes). The image-making process at Dura, it seems to me, is closely aligned with oral recitation and demonstration. Visual schemes drawn from a variety of local and broadly-recognized imperial artistic traditions, the abstract meanings of which were all familiar and immediately apprehensible, were better able to convey spiritual innovation and revelation to the religiously susceptible.

After the Babylonian exile, Hebrew as a living language gradually went out of use. The paraphrastic renderings of Scripture into Aramaic (or Greek), the vernacular of the Near East, enabled the congregation to understand the Hebrew of the Torah. As if to preserve the spontaneity of oral recitation, the Mishnah is quite emphatic that the *meturgeman*, in paraphrasing Torah, not have before him any written text; he must not read Torah, but listen to it and reiterate (*Mishnah Megillah* 44, 46, 49). Oral tradition is the chief source of the Mishnah redacted by Judah the Patriarch, especially for its tractate, *Pirke Avot* (Sayings of the Fathers), which is contemporary at its closure (the middle of the third century) with the synagogue paintings from Dura (Neusner 1984:57). There were no admonitions in the Mishnah to prevent the *meturgeman* from using visual reminders, promptcards, placards, or other illustrative

materials to polish his recitations. One is reminded, yet again, of the passage in the Jerusalem Talmud that passively tolerates the use of images (*supra* p. 595, footnote 4). That catechetical instruction was accompanied by visual aids is not easy to prove, but a passage from Paul's letter to the Galatians (3:1) may allow us to assume practices for Jews and Christians alike: "You stupid Galatians, how could you have been so hoodwinked (by other teachings), since you have seen with your own eyes this placard of Christ crucified." Citing this very passage in Galatians, Gingrich has glossed *prographo* as "to placard in public" (710-711). This passage in the New Testament and its gloss by Gingrich have passed without the notice of the art-historical community, though placards and wall paintings were the books of the illiterate.

There is substantial recent scholarly literature about oral tradition, i.e., God's continuing revelation to the Jews beyond the Pentateuch. Some Targumim have the quality of a sermon and oral instruction. There is even a Christian Targum, almost contemporary with the synagogue paintings at Dura, by Melito of Sardis, a late second-century bishop in the Church of Asia, whose sermon on the Pasch is preserved in a papyrus that is shared between the Chester Beatty Collection and the University of Michigan (Hall 1979; Kraabel 1971; Kraabel 1969:81-93; Kraabel 1968:198-249). Lohse and others have pointed out that the style and ethos of Melito's tractate are declamatory; he remarks, "What has been explained in Greek is the Scripture narrative in Hebrew of the Crossing of the Red Sea" (Lohse:1-9). This Targum-style paraphrase of Melito's was meant to be heard, not read. His prose is rhythmical, metrical with short impressive phrases, employing antithesis at every turn. The vernacular nakedness of Pharaoh's daughter and other figures, the folkloric embellishments of Hiel, and the Classical heroism of "Moses at the Burning Bush" served as accompaniments for sermon and debate, not as if the Durene Jews were a learned confraternity in a Senior Common Room at Oxford, but rather that they were a culturally diverse community of tradespeople, many of whom were transient, who relied upon images as the starting point for discussion and declamation of faith. The synagogue might be compared to a dockside sailors' chapel, frequented by fervent but not learned Jews.

That hand-held "placards," pinakes, or illustrative materials of some sort accompanied sermon and worship as I interpret in the passage of Paul to the Galatians seems sufficiently reasonable, albeit hypothetical. Many scholars are convinced the Roman army employed placards to explain campaigns to the populace, and that their form and composition somewhat influenced the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, the

Arch of Titus, and the Arch of Septimius Severus, for example. Scholars have commented on the prototypical aspects of Roman military placards: Rodenwalt, Veyne, Lehmann, Koepp, Hölscher and Brilliant (Brilliant 1967:223 ns 24-25; Hölscher:29-33). Paul Veyne has recently said of the Column of Trajan, "Without consistent composition or style the art was intended to be a pastiche of painted signs used to explain military conquests to the populace" (100). The correspondence of the panels on the Arch of Septimius Severus in Rome—itsself inspired by military placards—and some of the panels in the Dura synagogue, especially in the narrative construction of the scenes and the composition of figure groups and architectural and landscape elements, has been mentioned by Richard Brilliant (1967:224). Brilliant's fine observations, however, have unfortunately not reverberated in the later scholarly literature as they surely deserve.

When he was thirty-three years old, the young Septimius was put in command of a Syrian legion; in 186 A.D. he was appointed governor of Gallia Lugdenensis, where he married, as his second wife, Julia Domna, the high-born daughter of a priest at Emessa (Balty:91-104, especially 94 and 97; Rey-Coguais:45-62, particularly 55-58; Fréxouls; G. Downey:244-245; Cassius Dio LXXIX, 8). Later, at the close of the second century, his Parthian Wars were fought in Syria, just west of Dura, and the fortifications of the town itself were enlarged and strengthened in the first decade of the third century, probably under Septimius' or Caracalla's direct order. Herodian tells us that the emperor himself had placards or sign paintings sent to the Roman Senate that described and celebrated his military campaigns in Syria against the Parthian hoards (Brilliant 1967:223 n 23). Generations of painters at Dura might themselves have learned to paint by copying or recapitulating the sign paintings of Roman military illustrators in Septimius' employ not far from Dura itself. The motives and characteristics of Roman commemorative art reflected in the synagogue paintings may allude to this interdependency.

Except for the paintings of the *reredos*, the synagogue frescoes were probably the result of a single artistic campaign, c. 244/245 A.D., when the assembly hall was enlarged. Nothing in the technical aspects of the application of paint or plaster is out of the ordinary to suggest the piecemeal manufacture of the pictures. Some scholars have believed this because of the lack of any apparent unified artistic program or master plan for the synagogue. Although the decipherment of many of the iconographic interrelationships of the panels is impossible because of archaeological preservation, this paper has shown that certain seemingly

unrelated biblical cycles were conveniently arranged, perhaps color coded, for moral and allegorical purposes, and as a compliment to a patron(s). It is difficult for this art historian, at least, to believe that, given the challenge of painting four blank walls, artists here (or anywhere else for that matter) would have conjured up themes totally at random. Sets of placards or some portable illustrative materials, possibly on cloth like the medieval *mappamundi*, or on parchment, may have been influential; examples of the latter have actually been excavated at Dura. Ann Perkins has briefly commented on a series of five parade shields from Dura that were covered with parchment and painted with scenes. One carried an elaborate scene of Amazonomachy, another an Ilioupersis (Perkins:33-36, fig. 9).¹⁶ their rectangular format, local Durene style, figure study and composition allow us to envision other portable paintings from Dura, which have not survived.

A truly masterful study has appeared recently that bears upon our findings, even if only comparatively. It deals with the integration of oral recitation, popular religious (and secular) texts, conventionalized artistic vocabulary, and hand-held illustrative materials used as accompaniment to oral instruction. *Painting and Performance: Chinese Picture-Recitation and its Indian Genesis* discusses a thousand years of popular Buddhist folk literature from China, known as *pien-wen*, which has its origins in oral storytelling and hand-held pictures and placards (Mair).¹⁷ These narratives date from c. 600 A.D., and came to China from India along the caravan routes. Placards were often used by Buddhist nuns and priests in proselytizing, though lay entertainers employed them as well in a variety of circumstances, as Victor Mair has scrupulously demonstrated. Art historians and scholars of religion would do well methodologically to compare the process by which religious texts were

¹⁶One of the great but little-known treasures from the site is the so-called Dura shield, which is a fragment of parchment painted with a map, c. 250 A.D. It was an infantryman's shield with an unofficial military itinerary that charted the career of its owner; see Dilke (120-122, 169-170). When describing the representation of certain aspects of landscape in the synagogue frescoes one scholar categorizes details comparatively as "map-like," though without elaboration and conclusion; see Hill.

¹⁷Many examples from many cultures are cited by Mair to demonstrate the interdependence of painting and oral recitation. For example, in old Moldavia, entire churches were covered inside and out with colorful frescoes. As in the fifteenth-century monastery church at Voronet, these paintings illustrated Romanian folklore and scenes from the Bible and served as teaching aids for the illiterate, who would come to hear recitations of the tales portrayed (Mair:130). The events in the Song of Roland, which took place August 15, 778, were narrated in Sicily until recent times by picture-storytelling. Recent scholarship has shown that the rich pictorial tradition did not derive from a manuscript tradition. For centuries it was passed on by *raconti* using illustrative materials that had standardized elements; see Croce.

paraphrased and rehearsed for popular consumption in another cultural tradition, not far removed from Judaism by time or place, with an eye to these ancient highways of trade. Future research on the narrative sources of the Dura synagogue paintings must certainly consider documentary evidence from other, near contemporary, artistic oral traditions.

In his last chapter (111-131) Mair discusses the broad distribution of picture-recitation historically throughout the world and many examples of placards, some from the seventh century A.D. (and earlier), have actually survived. Certain features recur in the paintings or placards, tradition to tradition: figures or vertical elements like trees frequently divide scenes or episodes; main characters are repeated frame to frame; the paintings are most often on fabric; pictures traveled easily and motives from one culture or artistic tradition were quickly adopted by another; the paintings are often divided into panels or registers illustrating the various episodes of the stories; pictures were often for sale; folk tales, and religious and historical scenes are most commonly depicted; in many traditions there is audience participation and discussion. Comments such as the following are typical: "The audience becomes so involved with the narrative and its pictorial embellishments that they tremble and shiver" (139). Some of these compositional features can be identified on ancient monuments derived from placards like the Column of Trajan, the Arch of Septemius Severus, and, quite pertinently, in the frescoes of the Dura synagogue.

In conclusion, this paper can serve only as an introduction to the rhetorical dynamics of the synagogue panels and their effects on the congregation, to the role of patrons, artists, and artistic sources in oral traditions, and scriptural and non-scriptural accounts. I have tried to show that certain schemes from Roman imperial art were used in the synagogue paintings for definite instructional ends. Graeco-Roman elements were not chance intrusions into an art of hybrid nature; rather, the paintings do constitute somewhat an extension of Roman provincial art, especially in the rhetorical manipulation of scenes. Antithesis was an important technical device in ancient rhetoric—as it is in the paintings. It is more than just novel in this regard that in ancient Greek the word *schema* meant both a rhetorical figure of speech and the pose of a figure in a painting; *prographo* may have meant "to explain with a picture." The figures of Moses on Mount Horeb and of Pharaoh's daughter

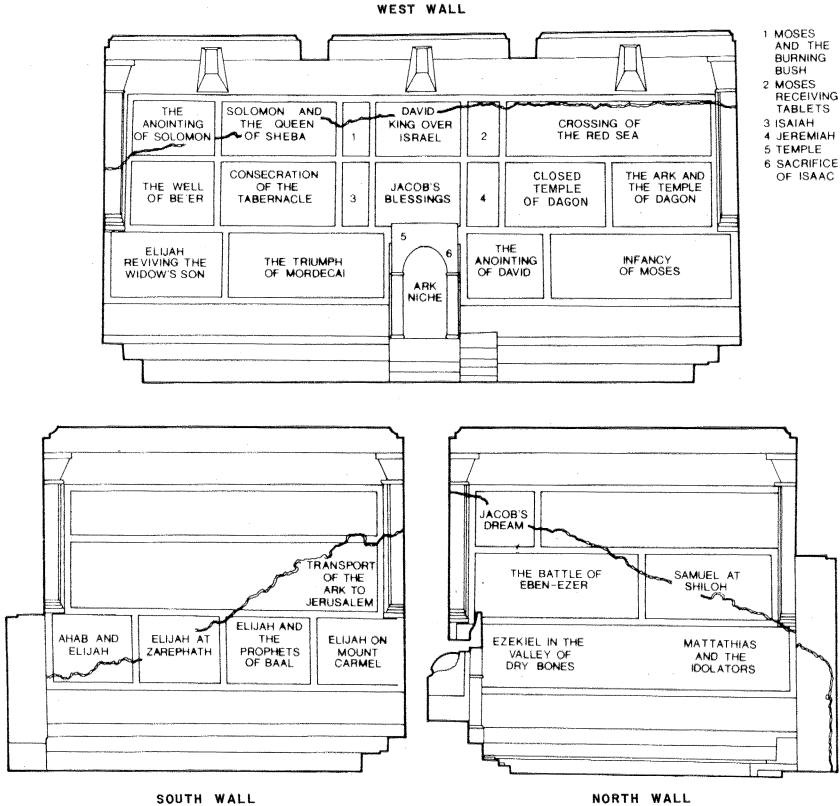
in the Nile are the more eloquent if one reflects on their past history and purpose for the future.¹⁸

¹⁸This paper has been given at the University of Iowa, Northwestern University, University of Missouri, Princeton University and, as the "Class of 1902 Lecture," at Bryn Mawr College. On these occasions I benefited from discussions with George Nickelsberg, J. Goldstein, James Packer, Hugo Meyer, John Gager, Jacob Neusner, Robert Guy, Gloria Pinney, Kim Hartswick, Alice Donohue and Brunilde Ridgway. I participated in a NEH Summer Institute, 1988, on Formative Judaism at Brown University where William S. Green, Paul V. M. Flesher, Ernest S. Frerichs, A. J. Levine and Jacob Neusner provided instruction and encouragement. I thank the many curators who provided the photographic documentation and permission to publish; in this respect I am most grateful to my colleague at Yale, Susan Matheson. I could not have accomplished the paper without the assistance of my Madison colleagues: Herbert Howe, Menahem Mansoor, Fannie LeMoine, Kenneth Sacks, Beth Kimmel, Loretta Freiling, and Jackie Captain. I received two generous research grants from the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I owe special debt to John Gager, Paul V. M. Flesher, Kim Hartswick, and Herbert Howe, which I warmly acknowledge, and to Herbert Kessler, in whose classes I first became fascinated with art history and with the frescoes from the Dura synagogue.

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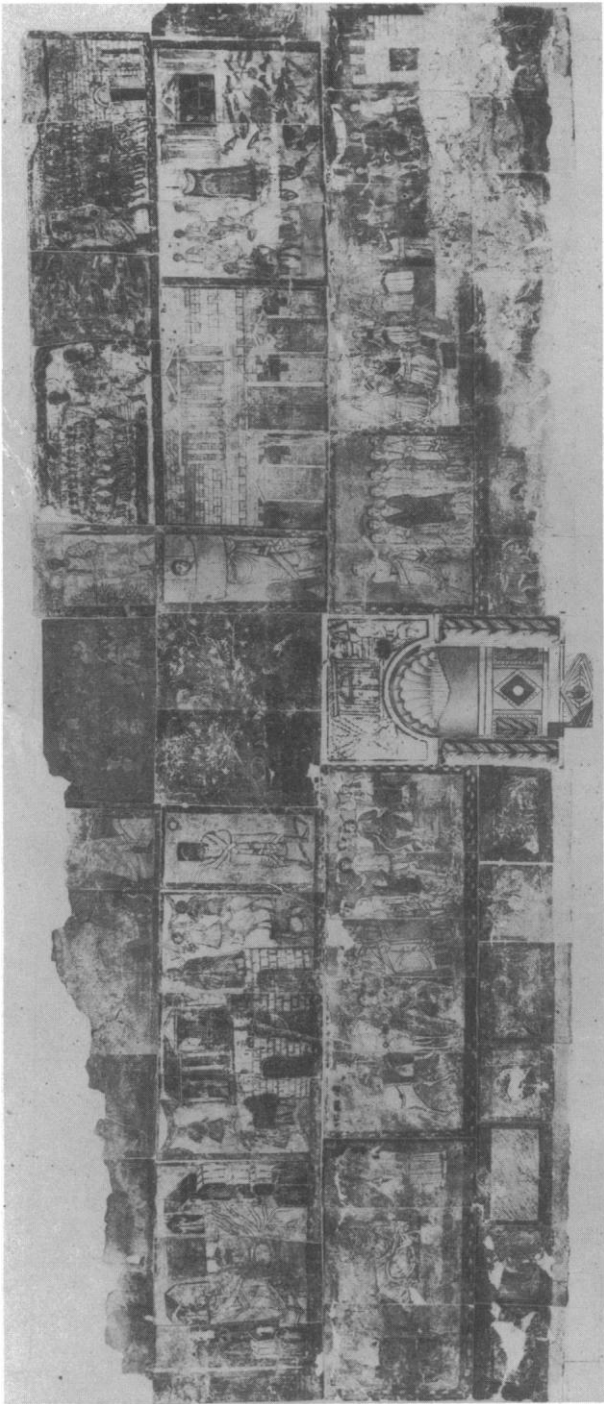


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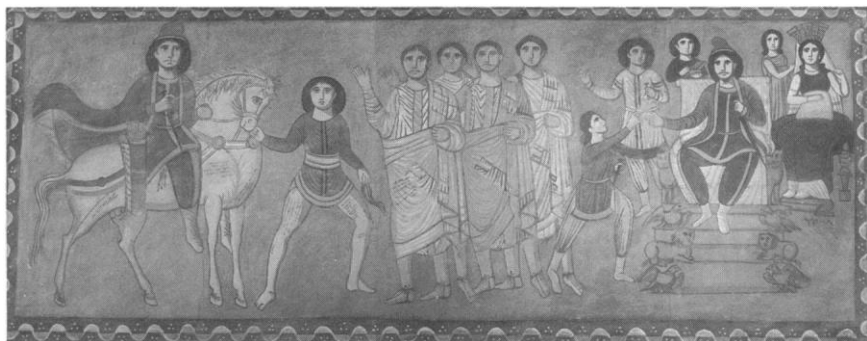


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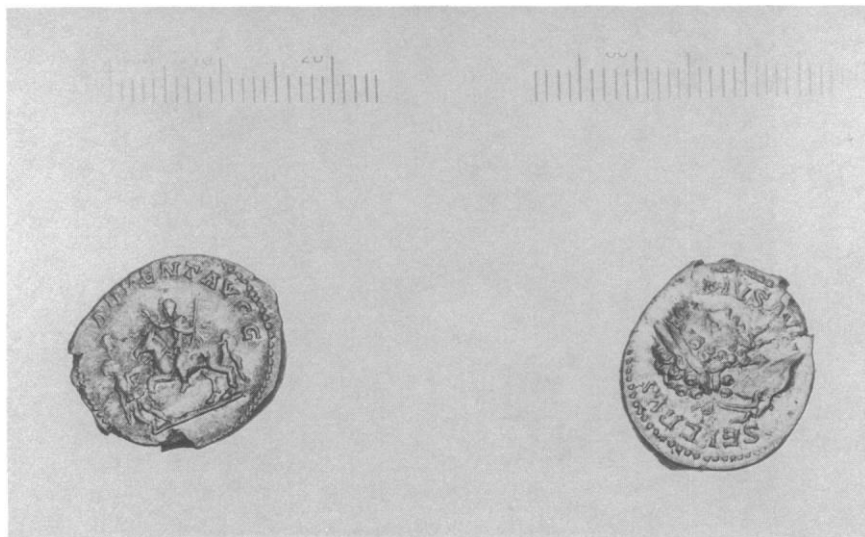


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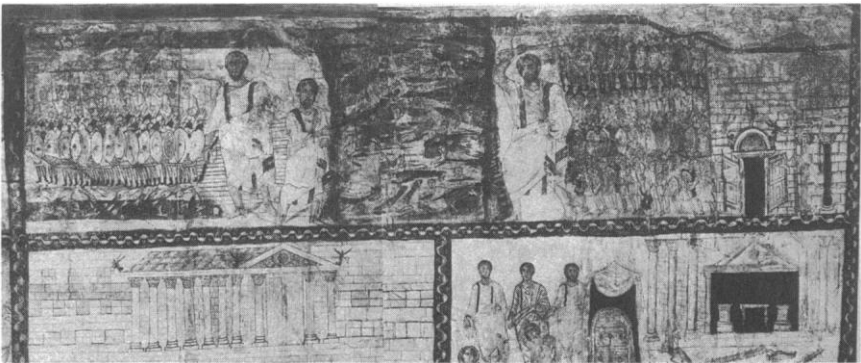


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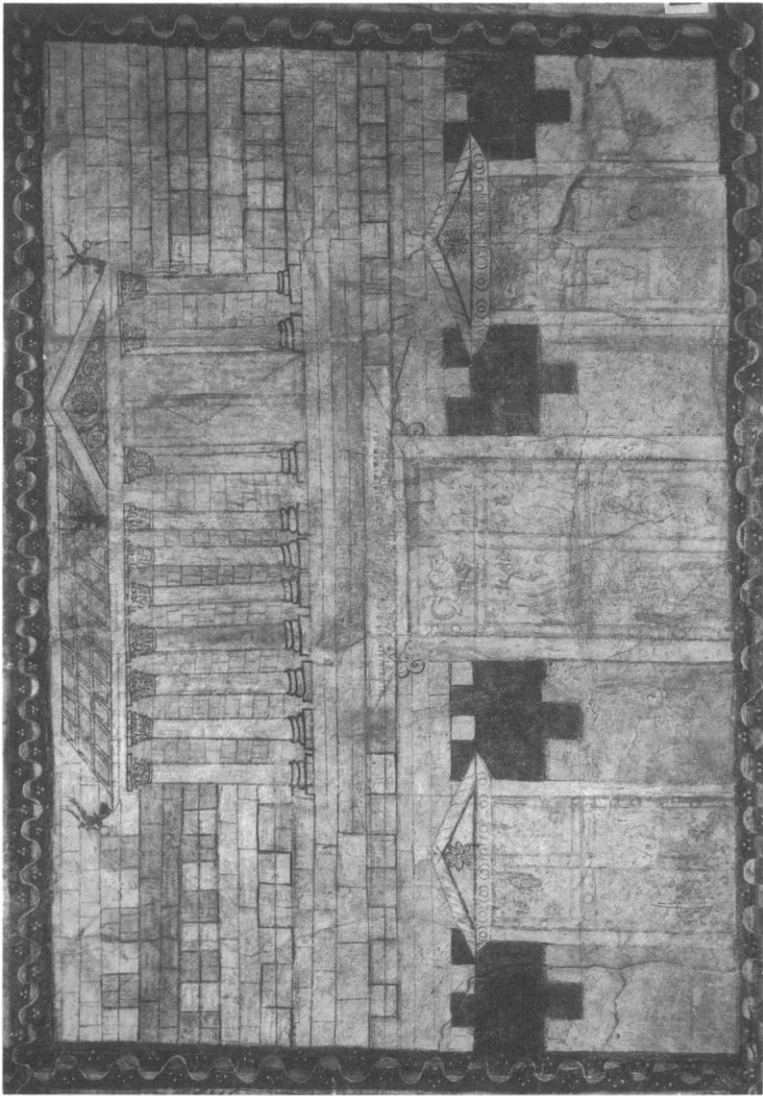


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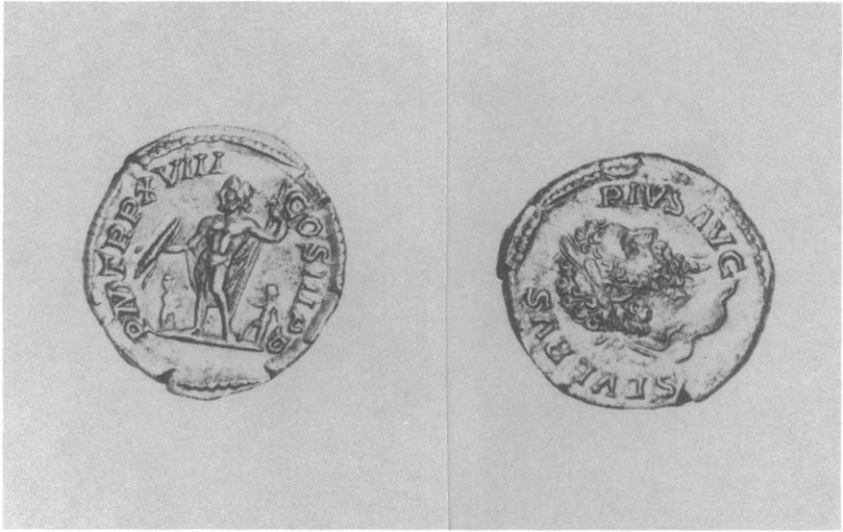


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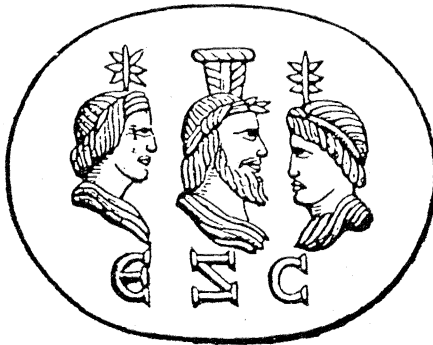


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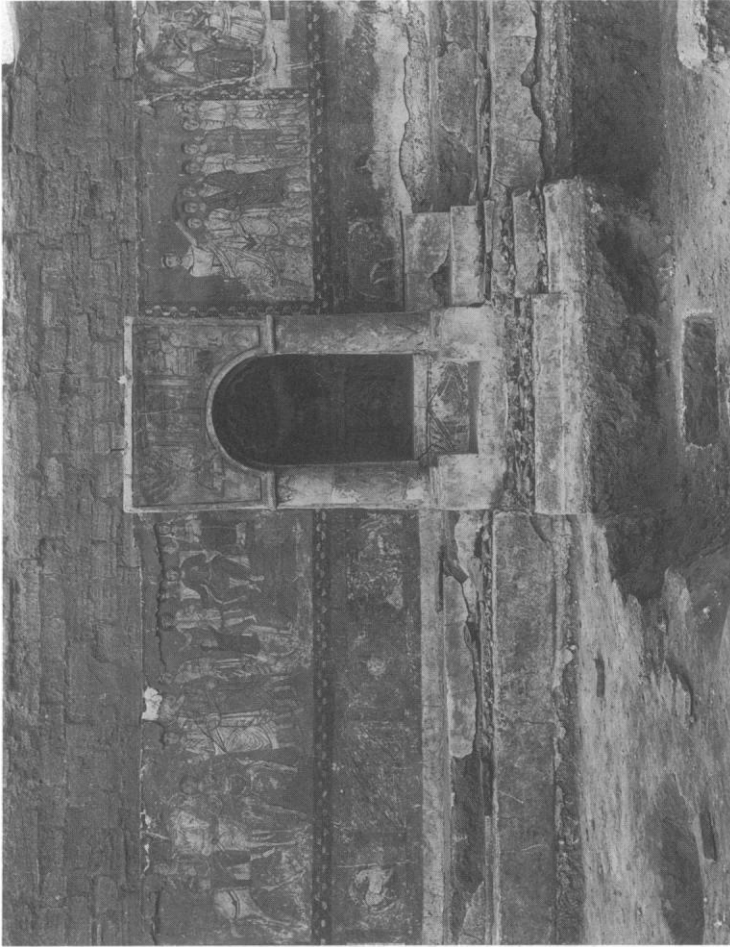


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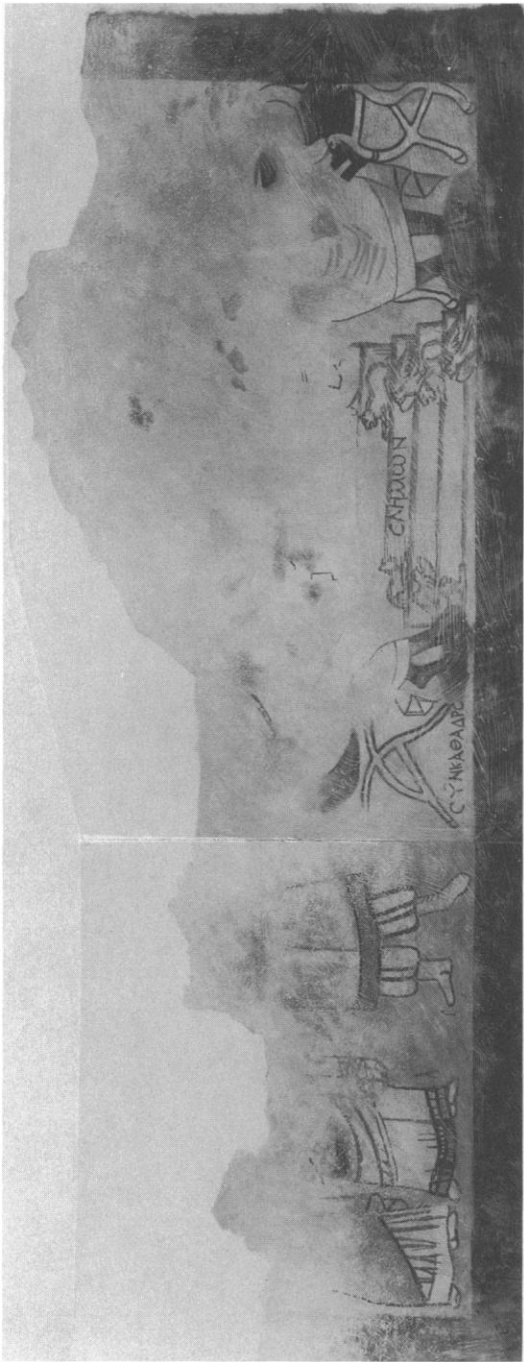


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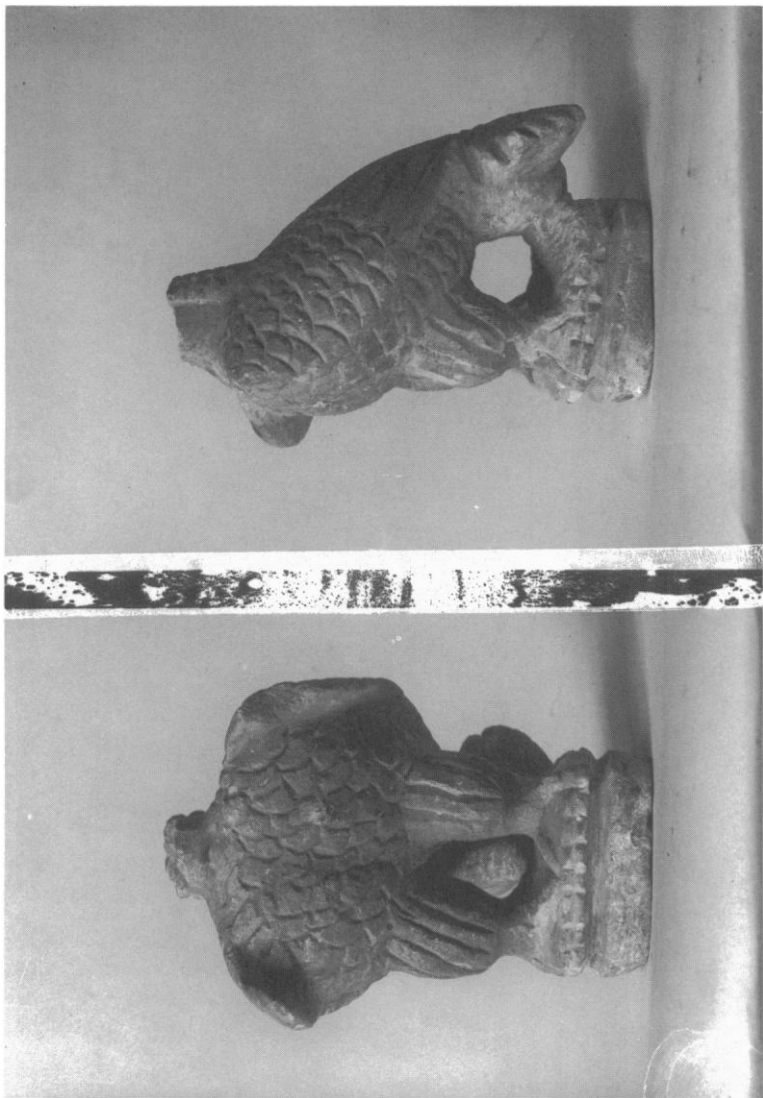


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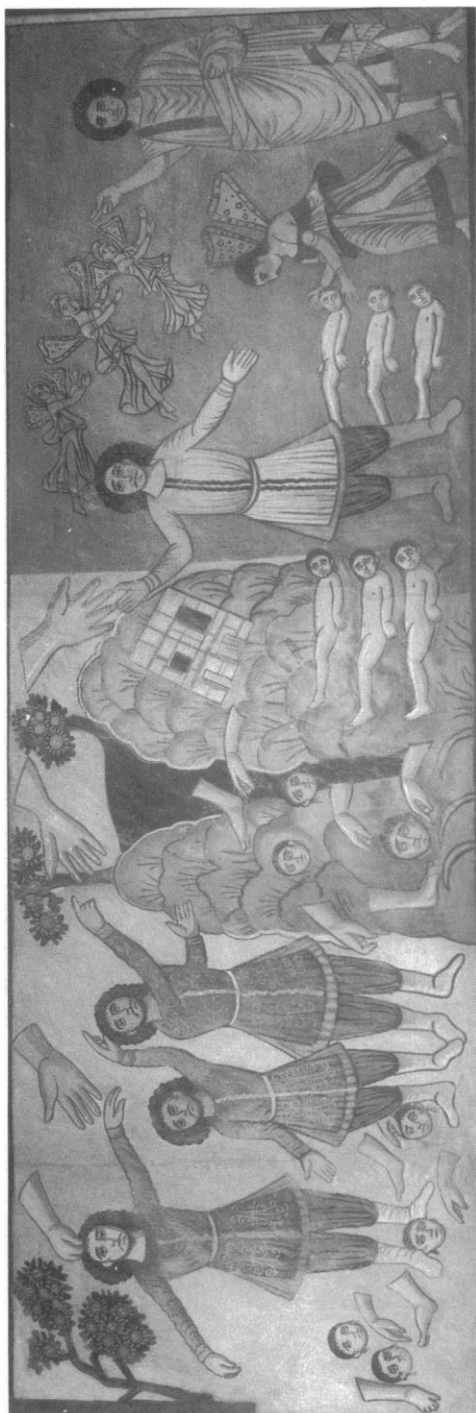


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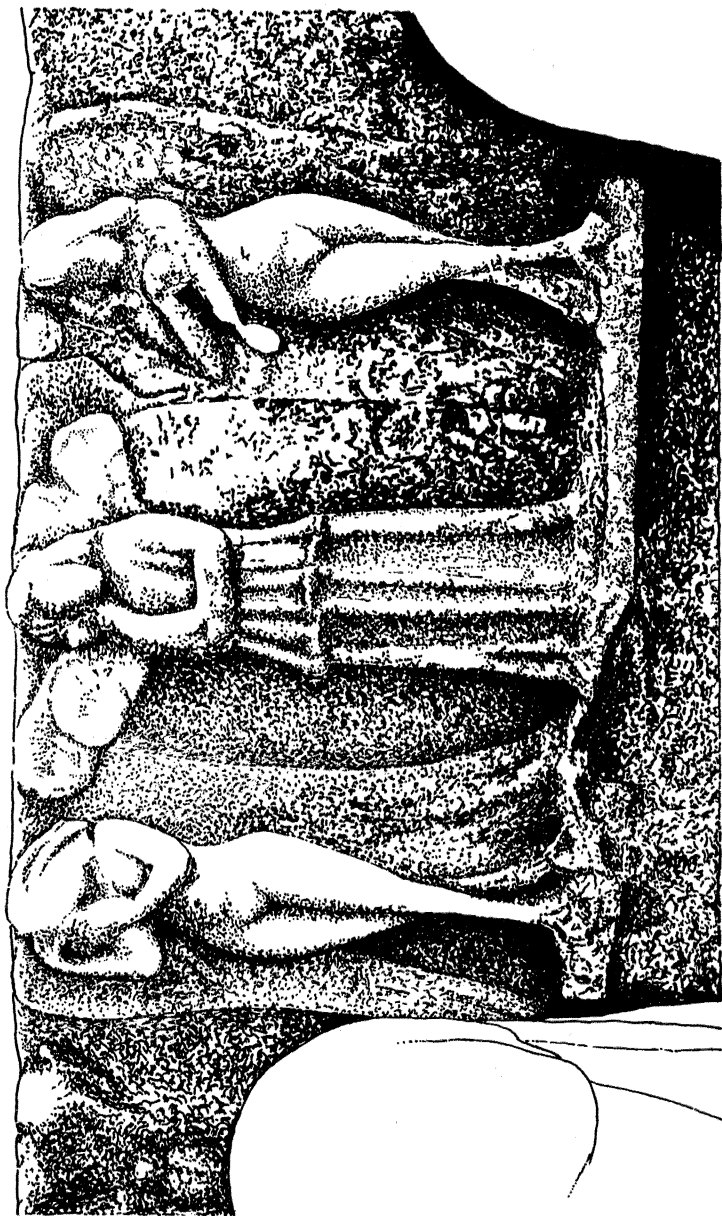
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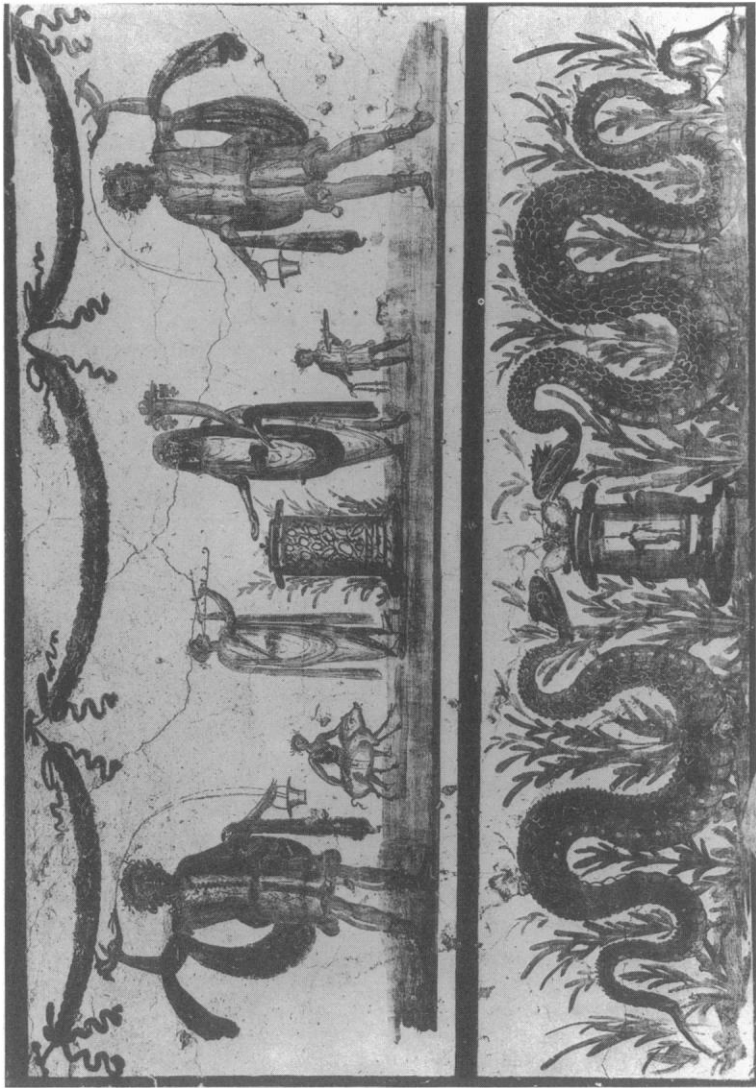


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“Most Women Engage in Sorcery”: An Analysis of Sorceresses in the Babylonian Talmud

Simcha Fishbane

Sorcery, first cousin, perhaps even sister, of the sacred, is the mistress of appearance. She is a relative slightly fallen in status, but within the family, who profits from the connections of her brother, who is received in the best circles.¹

For the social world in which the Rabbis of the Talmud lived, sorcery² was an undeniable reality. Everyone believed in sorcery, and other forms of magic,³ i.e., the utilization or manipulation of symbolic forms to draw upon sacred power or wisdom in order to gain such immediate benefits as health, power, knowledge or success.⁴ The Rabbis' book, of the 5th-7th century, the Talmud, which appears to be their platform for the presentation of their ideal society⁵ reflected the “realities” of this era in Jewish Mesopotamia, including sorcery. However, it would appear at first glance that not only the lay person, but the rabbi as well, believed and practiced certain types of magic,⁶ although the Rabbis would not term their powers as magical.⁷ Magic was attributed to the demonic (or in anthropological terminology the power of the “impure”)⁸. The rabbis did not practice magic but the “Torah” empowered them, as a result of their holiness,⁹ to perform supernatural deeds which to the outside observer seems to be exactly what magicians do.¹⁰ The Rabbis' supernatural powers were sanctioned because they represented “purity” or sanctity;¹¹ the sorcerers' powers were condemned seemingly because they represented demonic powers. Sorcery (*kishuf*), explains the Talmud, “serves to lessen the power of the Divine agencies” (BT Sanhedrin 67b).¹² In other words sorcery can be considered evil because it challenges religious beliefs and seeks to have human control or coercion of nature.¹³

The Talmud reports numerous cases of magic. This paper is concerned with the analysis of female sorcery, as presented in the Babylonian Talmud. It will also seek to understand, from the case of female sorcery, one aspect of the paradigm of the ideal Talmudic Rabbis' society, namely the role of women in the rabbinic social structure. For magical beliefs, as presented by the editors of the Talmud, indicate the precise nature of the social order of which they are symptoms.

I suggest that the Talmud, because it represents a patriarchal society¹⁴ which perceives women as being liminal¹⁵ in its social order or on the fringe of the male centered society and thus excluded from most central rituals, regards them as a threat to the patriarchal social structure.¹⁶ For example, the woman may be admitted to a religious ceremony only for a function characteristic of her status, as in the case of purification after her menstrual period. Therefore, as long as she does not deviate from her assigned role or cross her constrained boundary, a woman, being of liminal status, is not a threat. She becomes a threat, even while retaining her role as mother or wife,¹⁷ if she adopts roles not in accordance with the Talmud's ideal social order.¹⁸ In other words, when a woman becomes marginal in her society and adopts a deviant role (even in addition to her accepted functions) she can become a threat to her social order. An example of such deviance (or threat) in the Talmud is to be found in the case of sorcery. Thus, the issues for the Talmudic editor are first that of being a woman in the rabbinic society, which coincides with women's low and potentially threatening status, and second, the possible consequence of women deviating from the accepted norm, as in the case with the practice of sorcery.

Males, on the other hand, are not considered a threat to Talmudic society as are females, even though men, too, sin. This perception of the man by the Talmud editors means that if a man practices sorcery, he has only transgressed a law, not threatened the social order. He is "fully grounded in the controlled and orderly world of culture."¹⁹ In a male dominated society as the Talmuds', deviant female behavior such as sorcery could present a threat. This threat would dictate that its leaders be neutralized. An examination of the Talmud reveals different avenues utilized by the Rabbis to facilitate such a goal. For example, the Rabbis, as we shall see, speak of "women involved in sorcery" rather than of "sorceresses." The former are deviant women that can be dealt with. The latter suggest an organized social (or even religious) framework that present a serious threat to a patriarchal society.

The focus of this study will be women who practice sorcery. First, I will discuss the explicit pericopae in the Babylonian Talmud that address sorcery and employ the term for sorcery from the Hebrew or Aramaic roots *kishuf* or *haresh*.²⁰ I have not considered the cases where the Talmud discusses sorcery in general terms, as these have no direct bearing upon this study.²¹

Before commencing the discussion of sorcery, a methodological consideration is necessary. The Talmud, being a 5th-6th century edited document,²² reflects its

editors' mentality.²³ One can unpack their agenda by investigating the text's organization and classification system. This implicit communication, as in the case of the Babylonian Talmud, illuminates the culture or perceived culture of its redactors. Furthermore, as the Babylonian Talmud is an edited document, external sources, such as those attributed to Tannaic²⁴ authorities or the Palestinian Talmud, are also employed in the text (in addition to other parallel agendas) to manifest the world view of the Babylonian Talmud's redactor. The author's methodology does not examine the historical truth as expressed in the data, rather it explores the social *Weltanschauung* of its redactors.

Three classifications²⁵ of female sorceresses:

1. The Talmud's Assertion that Women Are Equated with Sorcery

While sorcery²⁶ was not an exclusively female occupation in late Antiquity,²⁷ the Talmud chooses to place special emphasis upon women as performers of sorcery. Thus we find declarations in the Talmud that as a rule women and sorcery are synonymous.²⁸ For example, while attributing the statement to a Tannaic source, the Talmud states:²⁹

Our Rabbis taught (*tanu rabbanan*): "[You shall not suffer] a [female] sorceress (*machshafah*) [to live]": this applies both to men and women. If so, why is a [female] sorceress (*machshafah*) stated? – Because mostly women are found [engage] (*metzuyot*) in sorcery (*keshafim*) (BT Sanhedrin 67a).³⁰

In the same tractate, 100b, the Talmud, when discussing the prohibition of reading Ben Sira, quotes from this book and declares:

A daughter is a vain treasure to her father: through anxiety on her account, he cannot sleep at night. As a minor, lest she be seduced: as a maiden, lest she play the harlot; as an adult, lest she does not marry, lest she bears no child; if she grows old, lest she engage in sorcery (*keshafim*).

Here sorcery is associated with the "shameful" female behavior of some women, as perceived in the Talmudic society. This behavior is considered as shameful as prostitution and spinsterhood.³¹ Moreover, the Talmudic editors, although repudiating Ben Sira, do not reject the claim that a woman as she grows old has the potential of being involved in sorcery.³² The redactors of the Talmud chose to link elderly women, especially those without protection of an extended family who must shield themselves through black magic,³³ with potential sorcery and thus classify their actions as negative behavior.³⁴ In the Babylonian Talmud there are no similar accusations of black magic for men.³⁵

In BT Berakhot 53a, we find the following discussion concerning making a blessing over spices. Commencing with statements attributed to Tannaic sources the Talmud states:

Our Rabbis taught: If one was walking outside the town and smelled an odor [of spices], if the majority of inhabitants are idolaters he does not say a blessing. R. Jose says: "Even if the majority are Israelites he does not say a blessing, because the daughters of Israel use incense for sorcery (*l'keshafim*)".

The editors of the Talmud immediately continue to deliberate:

Do all of them [the daughters of Israel] use incense [only] for sorcery (*keshafim*)? – The fact is a small part [of the incense] is used for sorcery (*keshafim*) and a small part for scenting garments...

While the link between incense and sorcery is partially retracted, the statement condemning the daughters of Israel as perpetrators of sorcery remains. The Talmud does not question whether the daughters of Israel were truly engaged in the performance of sorcery, but rather how such things were perceived. Although the text implies that all daughters of Israel are under suspicion of practicing sorcery, it is questionable if the Rabbis perceived every Jewish woman to be a sorceress. Rather, it would seem the woman was viewed as a plausible performer of sorcery.

In BT Erubin 64b, while quoting a second-century Tanna, R. Simeon b. Yohai, concerning the law "not to ignore discarded foodstuff," the Talmud states:

R. Johanan stated in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: "This applies only to the earlier generations, when the daughters of Israel did not freely indulge (*perutzot*) in sorcery (*keshafim*), but in the later generations, when the daughters of Israel freely indulged in sorcery (*keshafim*), one may pass them [eatables] by."³⁶

The Talmud's editors continue to discuss the type of foodstuffs that may be "bewitched"³⁷ (or have some sort of negative "spell" over them) but do not argue with the statement that "in later generations, the daughters of Israel freely indulged in sorcery." Whether historically this accusation is accurate or it concerns all daughters of Israel, is not the issue. This is the persuasion and terminology that the Talmud editors chose to present.

2. Male vs. Female Sorcerers

The second category of female sorcery in the Talmud makes an assertion or declaration in the form of a story. In these parables there is an additional component, namely, the male who has supernatural or magical powers. While on the one hand the Talmud emphasizes the relationship between sorcery and women, it also castigates the male who is not a rabbi and practices sorcery. Such a case is found in BT Gittin 45a where the editors relate an Amoraic incident where women cannot be comprehended as performers of miracles:

The daughters of R. Nahman used to stir a cauldron with their hands when it was boiling hot. R. Ilish was puzzled about it. It is written [he said], "One man

among a thousand have I found, but a woman among all those I have not found" (Eccl. VII 28); and here are the daughters of R. Nahman [women, not men who performed miracles]! A misfortune happened to them, and they were carried away captive, and he also with them. One day a man was sitting next to him who understood the language of the birds. A raven came and called to him, and R. Ilish said to him: "What does it say?" "It says," he replied, "Ilish run away, Ilish run away." He said, "The raven is a false bird, and I do not trust it." Then a dove came and called. He again asked, "What does it say?" "It says," the man replied, "Ilish run away, Ilish run away." Said [Ilish]: "The community of Israel is likened to a dove; this shows that a miracle will be performed for me." He then [said to himself], "I will go and see the daughters of R. Nahman; if they have retained their virtue. I will bring them back." Said he to himself: "Women talk over their business in the privy." He overheard them saying: "These³⁸ men are our husbands just as the Nehardeans [were] our husbands. Let us tell our captors to remove us to a distance from here, so that our husbands may not come and hear [where we are] and ransom us." R. Ilish then rose and fled, along with the other man. A miracle was performed for him and he got across the river, but the other man was caught and put to death. When the daughters of R. Nahman came back, he said, "They stirred the cauldron by sorcery (*keshafim*)."

In the above example, the editors of the Talmud have difficulty with the concept that women might have supernatural powers similar to those of the Rabbis who achieve their powers as a result of their holiness (and closeness to God) and the Torah. For them, women's supernatural powers can only be a consequence of evil.³⁹ Thus, the stirring of the cauldron could only be by demonic powers in contrast to the sanctity of the divine miracle. The complete instance of R. Nahman's daughters can be summed up to emphasize this point.

In Tractate Sanhedrin 67b, the reader is presented with a second Amoraic example, where not only women execute magical feats, but the male who also performs such feats is reduced to the lowly status of a woman.⁴⁰ Although in the following account the term "sorcery" does not appear, the case appears in the major Talmudical section concerned with sorcery (BT Sanhedrin 67, from which I have quoted extensively throughout this essay). There is thus no doubt of the editors of the Talmud's intentions that sorcery is at issue.⁴¹

Jannai⁴² came to an inn. He said to them, "Give me a drink of water," and they offered him *shattiha*.⁴³ Seeing the lips of the woman [who brought him this] moving, he [covertly] spilled a little thereof, which turned to snakes. Then he said, "As I have drunk of yours now do you come and drink of mine." So he gave her to drink, and she turned into an ass. He then rode upon her into the market. But her friend came and broke the charm [changing her back into a human being], and so he was seen riding upon a woman in public.⁴⁴

In the above case, the Talmud relates sorcery to both men and women. In contrast to the woman, the male sorcerer Jannai is made ridiculous and, his spell

nullified, finds himself on the back of a woman in public, without doubt an embarrassing situation with sexual overtones.⁴⁵

In the same discussion of sorcery in Sanhedrin 67b, the redactors of the Talmud offer an additional instance of women involved with sorcery.⁴⁶ The *sugya*⁴⁷ commences with an Amoraic discussion of the Tanna Rabbi Johanan's statement; "Why are they [sorceries] called *Keshafim*? Because they lessen the power of the Divine agencies." The editors of the Talmud continue with the following discussion:

There is none else besides Him (Deut. IV,35) R. Hanina said: "Even by sorcery (*keshafim*)." A woman once attempted to take earth from under R. Hanina's feet [to perform sorcery against him]. He said to her, "If you succeed in your attempts, go and practice it [sorcery]." It is written, however, "There is none else besides Him." But that is not so, for did not R. Johanan say: "Why are they called *mekhashefin*? Because they lessen the power of the Divine agencies." – R. Hanina was in a different category, owing to his abundant merit.

While the Talmud attributes to the Rabbi stronger power than that of the sorceress, the editors of the Talmud in our case do not explicitly deny the powers of sorcery. Again, in the above illustration, it would seem that the woman successfully performs the ungodly deeds of sorcery and not the rabbinic man. This is a point the Talmud elects to emphasize repeatedly. Whether this was necessarily so, was not the issue for the editors. That sorcery and women are closely associated, is the message they elected to convey to their readers.

3. Rabbinical Supremacy

The third category asserts rabbinical supremacy or powers over sorcery while continuing to reject female sorcery. This category has two sub-divisions: a. where the Rabbis suggest, recommend or are aware of treatments or remedies against sorcery; b. where the Rabbis exhibit superior powers to those of the female sorceres.

In Tractate Pesahim 111a,⁴⁸ we find the following Amoraic discussion:⁴⁹

When two women sit at a crossroad, one on one side of the road, and one on the other side of the road, facing each other, they are certainly engaged in sorcery (*b'keshafim*).⁵⁰ What is the remedy? If there is another road [available] let one go through it. If there is no other road, [then] if another man is with him, let them clasp hands and pass through; while if there is no other man, let him say thus; "Igrath Izlath, Asya, Belusia have been slain with arrows."

The Talmud here emphasizes the fact that while certain female acts raise suspicions of sorcery the Rabbis have the knowledge to enable even others to counteract the powers of evil.

A second example deals with the Rabbis' concern with the problem of "pairs" (even numbers).⁵¹ In Tractate Pesahim 110b, in an Amoraic discussion concerning the use of "pairs" the Talmud states:

Where sorcery (*keshafim*) is concerned, we fear even many [pairs], as with the case of a certain man who divorced his wife, [whereupon] she went and married a shopkeeper. Every day he [her first husband] used to go and drink wine, and though she exercised her sorcery (*keshafim*) against him, she could avail nought, because he was heedful of "pairs." One day he drank to excess and did not know how much he drank; until sixteen [cups] he was clear-headed and on guard; after that he was not clear-headed and took no care, [and] she turned him out at an even [number of drinks].

As long as the Rabbis' remedy is adhered to, the powers of sorcery have no effect. As soon as the Rabbis' advice is ignored, as in the above case, the sorcery takes effect.⁵² Repeatedly, as in this illustration, it is only the women who are portrayed as the executors of black magic; men sorcerers are not an issue for the Talmud. An examination of the Babylonian Talmud has not revealed any explicit illustrations of male sorcerers who deal with black magic.

In Tractate Yoma 83b, the Talmud, while discussing the statements of two first-generation Amoraim, Rav and Shmuel, offers a cure against the bite of a dog made mad by sorcery.⁵³

Our Rabbis taught: Five things were mentioned regarding a mad dog... Where does it [the madness of the dog] come from? – Rav said: "Females who perform sorcery (*nashim kashfaniyot*)⁵⁴ are having fun with it."⁵⁵

Subsequently the Talmudic Rabbis offer suggestions, simple folk remedies, for curing the bite mad dog made by sorcery.

The Talmudic Rabbis (BT Pesahim 110a) with their powers could without concern deal with the "polluted" world and not be affected. Thus the Amora Amemar reveals from his discussion with the leader of the sorceresses a formula for combating witches.

Amemar said: "The chief of the women who practice sorcery (*d'nashim kashfaniyot*) told me: 'He who meets a female who practices witchcraft (*nashim kashfaniyot*) should say thus: "Hot dung in perforated baskets for your mouths, O ye females who practice sorcery (*nashim d'kharshina*)! May your heads become bald! the wind carry off your crumbs, your spices be scattered, the wind carry off the new saffron which ye are holding, ye sorceresses (*nashim kashfaniyot*); as long as He showed grace to me and to you, I had not come among [you]; now that I have come among you, your grace and my grace are cooled.'"

The Talmud not only offers protective measures, but also exhibits the power of the rabbi to concur with "danger" in the supernatural world. This power, it can be argued, resulted from his saintly behavior, his acts of piety, religious observance

and study of Torah.⁵⁶ In the above pericope we also find the phrase “chief of women who practice sorcery” that suggests some type of group or sisterhood,⁵⁷ a sisterhood outside or on the perimeters of society.

In the following Amoraic pericope from BT Hullin 105b, the Rabbis exhibit greater supernatural powers than the woman who exercises sorcery. As in the other examples examined, it is the female who practices sorcery whom the Talmud adopts as its target.

Abaye also said, “At first I thought the reason why one should not eat vegetables from the bunch which was tied up by the gardener was because it had the appearance of gluttony, but now my Master has told me, ‘It is because one lays oneself open thereby to the dangers of sorcery (*keshafim*).’” R. Hisda and Rabbah b. R. Huna once were travelling on a ship. A certain lady⁵⁸ said to them, “Take me with you,” but they would not. She then pronounced a spell and the ship was held fast. They [in return] pronounced a spell and it was freed. She said, “What power have I over you? Seeing you do not clean yourself with a potsherd, neither do you crush a louse on your clothes, nor do you eat vegetables from a bunch tied up by the gardener.”

Here also it is the woman who performs the sorcery, while the Rabbi nullifies and overpowers the sorcery through his “holy powers.”⁵⁹

An examination of the Talmud reveals its social milieu, as defined by social scientists,⁶⁰ to be that of a high cohesive group with well established patterns of authority and norms of behavior.⁶¹ Since the established authority is male, women had little opportunity to exercise social power. They had clearly defined roles and positions. In the language of the social scientists, the woman had “separated graded compartments”.⁶² E. Berkovits⁶³ suggests that the Talmud’s references to sorceresses are best understood in the context of a woman exercising powers beyond her assigned boundaries⁶⁴ by engaging in sorcery. This behavior would then be considered a potential threat to the established society headed by the Rabbis. The Rabbis could hardly sanction a daughter of Israel whose deviant behavior threatened the social order.⁶⁵

In the Talmud the sorceress is not depicted as (to borrow a description from Frazer) a “wizened, toothless hag, with meeting nose and chin, bleary eyes and grizzled hair, bent double with age and infirmity.”⁶⁶ In fact the Talmud rarely refers to sorceresses as such, but rather to Jewish women who perform sorcery.

Moreover, as the editors of the Talmud demonstrate in the case of the daughters of R. Johanan (Gittin 45a), there is no possibility that a woman may perform magic similar to the Rabbis’ theurgy. This is not the case with regard to sorcery during the classical era where the Rabbis differentiate between good, or beneficent, and evil magic, irrespective of who the performer is.⁶⁷ For the Talmud, it is only the rabbi who is permitted⁶⁸ to practice magic, while others, especially women, are forbidden, since the rabbi’s powers and purpose is derived

from the sacred and women's powers are from another source, thought to be evil. Although the Talmud only reports the evil or non-beneficent magic performed by the female, the rabbi is reported to be absorbed in both beneficent and non-beneficent magic.

The illustrations cited by the Talmud, all Amoraic, also imply the existence of a sorority of female sorceresses, a phenomenon which seemingly existed in other cultures of Antiquity.⁶⁹ The Talmud reference to a “chief of women who exercise sorcery” (Pesahim 110a), the girl friend in the case of Janni (Sanhedrin 67b), the two women sitting at a crossroads (Pesahim 110a) and the daughters of Rabbi Johanan (Gittin 45a) all suggest some form of association. That the Talmudic Rabbis chose to ignore these women as a group and emphasize only their deviant behavior, the practice of sorcery, does not modify the text's implications of an association.⁷⁰

Any attempt to understand what may have induced the development of such a sisterhood within the rabbinic social order can be no more than a hypothesis.⁷¹ The data concerning the rabbinic society in the Talmudic period that we have was written by men to serve their patriarchal social structure and validate their interests. In such a case as ours, where the data is limited, discovering the woman's perspective can only be achieved through the symmetry – or the methodology of comparison – of cultures with similar characteristics.⁷² Yet one may not ignore that every social order possesses qualities intrinsically its own. Analogous social and cultural characteristics do not ipso facto imply similar causes or explanations. This consideration is especially weighty when the cultures compared are from different historical eras. Lack of data and methodological shortcomings restrict us from applying the evolutionary framework of historical analysis⁷³ or even other comparative methods which study the Israelite religion in context of contiguous traditions of the same era.⁷⁴ Furthermore, not only are there the constraints of historical differences, but one must be aware of the researcher's cultural bias in interpreting resemblances.⁷⁵

With this caution in mind I would like to suggest a possible hypothesis and surface parallel accounting for the development of a sorority of sorceresses in the rabbinic society of the Talmudic era, admittedly, resting this hypothesis on anthropological theory⁷⁶ and the comparison itself is made with a culture from another time and place.⁷⁷ Recently, Janice Boddy studied a group of women in Northern Sudan, members of the Zar (spirit) Cult, a group of women who claim to be possessed by spirits and practice rituals claimed necessary to pacify them.⁷⁸ This cult allows women to engage in non-socially acceptable behavior and even to take possession of otherwise forbidden objects. These women's belief in spirits and their powers (a form of the supernatural) goes unchallenged in the Muslim society of Northern Sudan; it is for them a holistic social reality as sorcery was for the Talmud's social order.⁷⁹ The Zar are a cult of women who function within the reality of their Muslim social religious structure as Muslim

wives and mothers, faithful to Muslim culture and religion (except for their cultic practices). Boddy emphasizes that “women see no incompatibility between the Zar and Islam; to them the possession ritual is part of a general religious enterprise.”⁸⁰ Indeed, Muslim men view the women’s participation in the Zar as a female weakness linked to their inherent moral frailty. The majority of the men do not deny the Zar’s existence, although they dislike its goings on. This cult, accordingly (as examined and presented by Boddy), appears to be more structured and organized than the Talmudic “sisterhood of sorceresses;” its logic and the reactions to it, nevertheless, point to potentially similar patterns that might recur elsewhere among seekers of selfhood through the supernatural. Do not, after all, the editors of the Talmud, presenting the paradigm of their ideal society, admit that sorcery exists and that the daughters of Israel, being women, are absorbed in it?

Moreover, the characteristics of this Sudanese culture, especially with respect to the place of women’s, the restrictions and religious laws that govern them, their obligations and limitations vis-à-vis their husbands and family, their fertility role, and in general, their status and societal role, are almost synonymous with that of the women portrayed in the Talmud. In such high-grid, group cultures as those of the Zar and the Talmud, there is also a similar attitude to physical realities such as the woman’s body, blood, the home, and so forth. In other words, in both social orders, the woman’s social space and symbolic limits are securely organized and bounded. In response, the women of the Zar express and maintain their identity, integrity, and personhood through their spirit rituals. The Zar has the “capacity to offset the determining tendency of cultural dispositions and imperatives.”

At the same time, the Zar tacitly cautions villagers, and women in particular, to keep cultural values in proper perspective, to acknowledge their inherent relativity.⁸¹ This they do not do by denying their ascribed inferiority, but rather by transcending it. The Zar is hence a cultural resource appropriated by individuals under specific circumstances. When, says Boddy, a woman’s self-image and expectations clash with experiential realities, as they often must in a male-dominated society, the result is a paradox. “And when this paradox is realized subjectively it may lead her to claim she is possessed.”⁸² In other words, “Zar possession is a strategy which women use in an oblique attempt to redress the effects of their subordinate social status.”⁸³ Following this explanation, the women of the Talmud’s patriarchal society would turn to sorcery for similar reasons.⁸⁴

The reaction of men, in both cases, may be understood in this light. Men, as a rule, grudgingly accept, but do not participate in the Zar. The few that do participate will not publicly admit their affiliation “for fear of losing face”⁸⁵ and “damaging their reputation and masculine self-image.”⁸⁶ The Talmud’s editors too portray the man involved in sorcery as having lost face. These reactions,

nonetheless, do not detract from the benefits derived by women. Men may prefer to see women as "compartmentalized" and of lower status. Yet, at least for those women who participate in such as the Zar and sorcery, whatever consciousness they have of themselves is neither one of inferiority nor of wholesale subordination. Not at war, nor suffering from defeat, they consider themselves, through their own initiates and cultic actions, engaged in a dialectical relationship of qualitatively disparate, yet socially equivalent parts. This, at least, is partial solace.

NOTES

1. Emmanuel Levas, *Nine Talmudic Readings* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 141.
2. In order not to confuse the medieval concept of "witch" with the witches of late Antiquity, I have chosen to use the term "sorcerer(ess)" or "sorcery" to manifest the concept. I therefore will also translate *machsefta* as sorcerer(ess).
3. For a discussion of Jewish belief in magic during the Talmudic era, see Jacob Neusner, *Talmudic Judaism in Sasanian Babylonia* (Brill, 1976). After a detailed discussion on the Iranian influence on Jewish Babylonia he writes: "Magic, astrology, and other occult sciences, were as attractive to Jews as they were to pagans and Christians; these were regarded as advanced sciences, and to reject them, the Jews and their leaders would have had to ignore the most sophisticated technological attainments of contemporary civilization. It was natural for Jews to borrow from, and contribute to, the cultural resources of the region. Such borrowing, standing by itself, proves only that the Jews shared in the occult practices of the common life of Babylonia" (148). See also Morton Smith quoted in *ibid.*, 56.
4. These powers are usually exercised by special skilled, trained, qualified persons in relation to specific clients or groups of people treated as clients.
5. See S. Fishbane "The Ideal Rabbinic Society," *Rabbis in Academia* 1 (1991), for a discussion of the Talmudic Rabbis' ideal society.
6. This is what Gershon Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism: Merkavah, Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1960), 75 ff., termed "theurgy".
7. See for example B. Sanhedrin 67a and 67b where the rabbis practice magic. Vegetables are created and destroyed in a field in such a fashion.
8. I am using the term in the anthropological sense. By this I mean impure is at the opposite pole of holiness. For a detailed presentation of this term in this connotation see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London and Henly: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).
9. Terms as holiness, purity and sanctity are employed in the anthropological sense to reflect a level of religiosity acquired by one's behavior and learning as depicted in rabbinical Judaism. These terms are used in the same context explained by E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1947) and N. Rubin "The Sages Conception of the Body and Soul," in *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society*, edited by Simcha Fishbane (Montreal Concordia University, 1989), 47-104. See also note 11.

10. Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews of Babylonia*, vol. 5 (Brill, 1970), 180. See for example BT Sanhedrin 67b, where the Rabbis created a calf on a Friday. Done by the Rabbis, it was considered "purity", by others it would be "pollution".
11. For the purpose of this study I define "witchcraft" as the exercise of evil. Furthermore I shall use the term "sorcery" or "sorcerer" and "magic" synonymously with "witchcraft". A discussion of these terms is found in W. Lessa and E. Vogt, *Reader in Comparative Religion*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 332-334.
12. Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, 1040-1174), a premier commentator on Talmud, explains this to mean that through sorcery death can be brought upon one who was decreed to live.
13. For a detailed discussion of the Rabbi as a magician see Neusner, *Talmudic Judaism*, 46-86.
14. By "patriarchal" I refer to a male dominated society in leadership, public and family spheres. This type of society mostly considers male privileges.
15. The term "liminal" refers in this instance to a woman being on the fringes or the threshold of the society. Anthropological literature discusses extensively why women are liminal in a patriarchal society. See for example Sherry Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in *Women, Culture and Society*, edited by Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1974). For the purpose of this study, there is no need to reiterate these discussions. Rather we commence with the conclusion that women are presumed liminal. For a discussion of liminality in Judaism as used in the anthropological sense see Nissan Rubin, "Historical Times and Liminal Time: A Chapter in Rabbinic Historiosophy" (Hebrew), *Jewish History*, vol. 2 no. 2, Fall (1987).
16. For a discussion of woman as a danger to society in general and to Jewish society in particular, see for example Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), Judith Wegner, *Chattel or Person* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) and Meir Bar Ilan, "Witches in the Bible and the Talmud," to be published in *Different Approaches to the Study of Talmud*, S. Fishbane, editor (1991).
17. I use these terms as understood within the patriarchal institution of marriage, to be distinguished from motherhood as the experience of reproduction. Moreover, Judith Romney Wegner, "Public Man, Private Woman: The Sexuality Factor and the Personal Status of Women in Mishnaic Law," in *Jewish Law Association Studies* IV, 23-53, and her article "The Image and Status of women in Classical Judaism," in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, edited by Judith Baskin (Detroit, 1990), 68-93, which distinguishes between the private and public domain rabbinic law. She concluded that in the private sphere the Mishnaic (and Talmudic) woman in the case where it affected some man's ownership of her sexual and reproductive function experienced in (legal theory) a low level of personhood, as in the instance of mother or wife. In areas not related to the sexual and reproductive function she enjoyed a high level of personhood. In the public domain as in the case of sorcery these women, by contrast, were perceived as nonentities. The rabbinic culture of late Antiquity chose to exclude the "public domain" woman from participation in public expressions of the communal religious enterprise. My essay substantiates Wegner's argument as can be concluded from the cases and the analysis presented.
18. The stance of the Talmud's editors on women coincides with their judicial approach, which defines the social process of their society in terms of rights and obligations. Wegner, *Chattel or Person* in her analysis of the Rabbis' society as implied in the Mishnah, argues that "hybrids" or individuals that do not fall into an already defined category could not be tolerated. This concept also seems to be demonstrated in the Talmudic social structure. I will discuss the reasons for this in my conclusion.

19. See Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits* (The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 115.
20. I have not included the pericope from BT Shabbat 75a that states: "...He who pulls the thread of a seam on the Sabbath is liable to a sin offering; and he who learns a single thing from a magian is worthy of death... . As to magianism, Rav and Samuel [differ thereon]; one maintains that it is sorcery, the other blasphemy." Since magians are pagan priests and therefore excluded from the Talmudic society, there was no need for the Rabbis to equate them with women or female witches. (For a discussion of magians see Neusner, *Talmudic Judaism*, 78-86.)
21. Examples of such cases are found in BT Erubin 62a, where the Talmud discusses the joint lease with a heathen. The Talmud makes a general statement that the heathen might not want to share the courtyard because he fears sorcery. An additional illustration is found in BT Menahot 65a, where the reader is informed that in order for one to be appointed to the high court of 70 (*Sanhedrin*) one of the criteria is the knowledge of sorcery. Nor have I included the topic of *ov* and *yidoni* (necromancy and soothsayer). Although the Talmud (BT Sanhedrin 67a) includes them under the category of sorcery and they are forbidden there, sorcery cannot be classified as evil or black magic. Furthermore, as stated above, our concern is the Talmudic editors' choice of terminology for sorceress and sorcery.
22. See Jack Lightstone, "Form, Formularies and Meaning in the Talmud: The Case of Bekhorot 2ab," to be published in *Different Approaches to the Study of Talmud*, edited by Simcha Fishbane, which shows the Talmud to be an edited document. In addition Lightstone offers other sources who also argue this.
23. For a discussion of the implicit meanings communicated in a rabbinic text see Jack Lightstone, *Society, the Sacred and Scriptures in Ancient Israel* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 1988).
24. Tannaim (or Tannaic) refers to the rabbis of the Mishnah period while Amoraim refer to the rabbis of the Talmudic period.
25. Classifications deal with the way a cultural system is organized. In the case of a text, this organization can be implied from the structure of the text.
26. This term is employed in the same sense as the term magic is. See note 1 for a more detailed explanation.
27. Bar Ilan, "Witches," discusses and offers numerous sources for male witches both Jewish and non-Jewish in Antiquity.
28. Although one can assume these were only atypical, deviant women, the Talmudic editors chose to categorize all women as practicing sorcery.
29. Translations of the Talmud text are based upon the Soncino Talmud translation. I have made changes where I did not accept this translation.
30. The Palestine Talmud, Sanhedrin, Chapter 7 Halakhah 13, also discusses the same ruling concerning the verse "a sorcerer(ess) should not live," but writes, "... that the Torah teaches excepted normative behavior (*derekh eretz*), since the majority of women are sorceresses." The Babylonian Talmud's editor chose to modify this claim and write that most women are engaged in sorcery, a statement the implications of which will be described below.
31. This would also follow Wegner's theory (see note 17) since the unmarried woman fails to conform to the private domain status model.
32. The issue of the elderly woman coincides with the anthropological findings that in a controlled patriarchal society, as the Talmud's, the older the woman, the more powerful she may become (see for example, C. Lindholm and C. Lindholm, "Life behind the Veil," in *Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Phillip Whitten and David Hunter [Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1987], 241). It is therefore

implied by the Talmud editors that an elderly woman coinciding with her potential status of power, and coinciding with her not being involved with her family roles, such as not being able to bear children or having to raise them, was perceived by the Rabbis as a possible threat (in contrast to the elderly male who was revered).

33. "Black magic" refers to magic that is assumed to result in a negative consequence, such as damage to property, health and life. See for example, R. Firth, *Human Types – Introduction to Social Anthropology*, 1958.
34. Such claims, equating elderly and barren women with witches, are found in the Greco-Roman classical literature as well as in contemporary anthropological research on women. For example, see Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*.
35. It is interesting to note the subsequent statement of the Rabbis which further emphasizes the Talmud editors' perception of women. The Talmud states: "The Rabbis have said the same, 'The world cannot exist without males and females. Happy is he whose children are males and woe to him whose children are females'."
36. It is interesting to note that in Vayikra Rabba 27 and in the Palestinian Talmud, Demai Chapter 3 Halakhah 3, the same conclusion is found differently: "R. Yaakov b. Zavdi in the name of R. Avahu [says] this [law of avoiding the eatables] was at first true, but presently it is permissible [to avoid] them because of witchcraft." In addition to attribute the ruling to different Rabbis, women are not mentioned.
37. It is not sure what negative effects these spells were supposed to possess.
38. "These" refers to their non-Jewish captors, the Nehardeans are the Jewish husbands, and since women enjoyed their new non-Jewish husbands they wanted to be as far away as possible from their Jewish husbands to avoid complications.
39. This instance of dichotomous thought was very prevalent in all stories concerning male and female polarity in Hellenistic literature. See Judith Romney Wegner, "Philo's Portrayal of Women – Hebraic or Hellenistic?" in *Women Like This – New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine (1991), 41-66.
40. In the few cases, as in our instance, that a male sorcerer is mentioned in the Talmud he is presented as of lower status than the woman.
41. This case is preceded by an illustration of male sorcery. It is not clear whether the Talmud is referring to illusions or sorcery. The magicians in this case are Arabs and not Jews, therefore, not a threat to the rabbinical society. In the cases of female witchcraft, even where the Talmud does not state if they are Jewish or not, there is no reason not to assume that they are not.
42. Although it may be argued that Jannai is R. Jannai the Amora, it seems unlikely that the Talmud's editors would deviate from their literary patterns and place the Rabbi in such a negative and embarrassing situation.
43. In the Jastrow *Dictionary* this term is explained to be a liquid made from flour of unripe barley mixed with water.
44. The transforming of people into animals, including donkeys, was commonly attributed to witches in Antiquity. See for example, J. C. Baroja, *The World of the Witches* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 36, where the discussion is in the classical Graeco-Roman period, and Parrinder, *Witchcraft: European and African* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), for Near Eastern beliefs. Specific illustrations of transformation into donkeys are found in M. Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (New York: Pocket Books, 1954).
45. In Sanhedrin 67b we find a case of the father of Karna, Karna being a first generation Amora, who performed magic. Although Rashi describes him as a sorcerer, it is not clear whether he is a witch or a Rabbi, and whether his magic is evil or not. The story only tells us that he pulled ribbons from his nose. Moreover, it is not clear from the Talmud's story whether it was magic or illusions he was performing.

46. This illustration is also appropriate to my section 3: Rabbinical Supremacy.
47. A *sugya* is a section of the Talmud usually concerned with the discussion of one theme.
48. In the same *sugya*, a general statement of witchcraft is also made concerning general travel behavior where witchcraft exists. No mention of the performers of the sorcery are mentioned.
49. The *sugya* commences with a discussion of a Tannaic statement: "One [a man] should not pass between two dogs, palm trees, and women." Although this would seem to be concerned with witchcraft (as claimed by the Talmud commentators) witchcraft is not stated explicitly until the illustration I cite.
50. Similar illustrations are reported about sorcery in the classical Graeco-Roman period. See Baroja, 26.
51. It was believed that doing any activity in even numbers rather than odd numbers is dangerous.
52. Although it is not explicitly stated what actually occurred to the man, there is no doubt that according to the Talmudic story witchcraft was performed on him.
53. See Baroja, 26 where he reports of similar sorcery illustrations in the Graeco-Roman period.
54. I am not translating *kashfaniyot* as Soncino understands it, as a sorceress. In this instance I accept the Marcus Jastrow translation of the term *kashfaniyot*.
55. The Palestinian Talmud, Chapter 8 Halakhah 5 writes concerning mad dogs, "a woman is performing sorcery."
56. There are numerous other accounts reported in the Talmud where the Rabbis speak or consort with demons. See for example, BT Pesahim 112b. Furthermore, an examination of the Talmud reveals that the editors chose to portray the "class" of Rabbis as one of sanctity.
57. By "sisterhood," "association" or "sorority" of witches, I refer to a support group rather than an organization with hierarchy and control.
58. The literal translation of *matrona* is a lady of quality and therefore it can be assumed that the Talmud refers to a Jewish woman. Rashi argues that the term refers to a non-Jewish woman. This case is only applicable to our discussion if the sorceress is Jewish. A gentile would not be considered a threat to the Rabbis' social order.
59. Although not concerned with women, the Talmud reports a case which expresses the Rabbis' hesitancy in their belief of witchcraft. When confronted with a "medical issue," the Rabbis chose to disregard the power of sorcery in favor of preventive medicine. BT Hullin 84b, states, "R. Yochanan also said, [drink] a cupful of (*charsinan*) witchcraft, then a cupful of lukewarm water; that is only if it is in a metal vessel, but in an earthenware vessel it does no harm." Only if the Rabbis doubted the powers of sorcery would they have made such a statement favoring preventive medicine over black magic.
60. For a discussion of this theory by social scientists see Nissan Rubin, "The Sages Conception of the Body and Soul," in *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society*, edited by Simcha Fishbane and Jack Lightstone (Montreal: Concordia University, 1989), 47-104.
61. In Greek drama the woman was also portrayed negatively. Medea says, "nature has made us [women] absolutely incapable of doing good and particularly skillful in doing evil" (quoted in Baroja, 61.27).
62. Mary Douglas, *Cultural Bias* (Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1978), 20.
63. Eliezer Berkovits, *Jewish Women in Time and Torah* (Hoboken N.J: Ktav Publishing, 1990), 24-25.
64. This can also be understood in the context of Wegner's public domain characteristics. See note 17.

65. Mary Douglas, *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations* (London, New York, Toronto: Tavistock Publications, 1970), xxvii-xxviii, who discusses the witch as an internal and external enemy.
66. Quoted in G. Parrinder, 119.
67. See for example Baroja, 18 who demonstrates this view.
68. See the discussion in BT Sanhedrin 67b-68b.
69. See for example Baroja, op. cit., 79.
70. Wegner, *Chattel or Person*, 239 n. 218 further develops this theme: "Patriarchal cultures and modern societies emerging from them have tended to perceive fellowship as a male institution, in part because it involves a public assembly, whereas women were expected to remain scheduled at home, making a fellowship of women difficult or impossible in practice."
71. Wegner, *Chattel or Person*, 1988, 148 based upon the Mishnah in Pesahim 8:7 argues that women were forbidden in the area of religious practices to form any type of organized group.
72. Anthropologists have proposed the methodology of the comparison of cultures both diachronically and synchronically. See for example Douglas (1966), op. cit., who illustrates this theory.
73. Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana Press, 1990), 1-28. He discusses the shortcomings of traditional historical methodologies and advantages to anthropological methodologies in the study of ancient Israelite and Rabbinic texts.
74. See *ibid.*, 1-20.
75. For a discussion of the impact of cultural bias upon research and the researcher, see Mary Douglas, "The Effects of Modernization of Religious Change," *Daedalus* 111/1 (1982).
76. In addition to Eilberg-Schwartz's survey of the historical and anthropological theories see Rubin, op. cit.
77. Eilberg-Schwartz argues, "Comparison thus emerges as a tool for imagining the unspoken meaning and correspondences that once constituted a cultural system." Eilberg-Schwartz, 27. While Eilberg-Schwartz argues that such comparisons can be made between religions from different times and place, I choose to retain as many comparable characteristics as possible and thus only differ in time and the geographical location. I also choose to compare religions whose basic social order is similar as well as stemming from a similar theology.
78. Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).
79. *Ibid.*, 136.
80. *Ibid.*, 142.
81. *Ibid.*, 117.
82. *Ibid.*, 122.
83. *Ibid.*, 139.
84. See E. Evans Prichard, *Witches Oracles and Magic Among the Azanda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).
85. Boddy, 138.
86. *Ibid.*, 259.

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“Deal gently with the young man”*: Love of Boys in Medieval Hebrew Poetry of Spain

By Norman Roth

Medieval Hebrew secular poetry apparently had its beginning in Muslim Spain under the direct influence of secular Arabic poetry, which reached its zenith in Iraq and continued to develop in al-Andalus. The secular Hebrew poetry produced elsewhere, in Egypt, North Africa, and Italy, was very likely influenced by the poetry written in Spain. This development of secular poetry was part of a conscious renaissance of the Hebrew language, itself a reaction to Muslim influences.¹ Hebrew poetry and literature in Spain was not, of course, confined to the Muslim period, but its greatest peaks of development occurred then. Accordingly I shall concentrate on that era, giving particular attention to the four greatest Hebrew poets of Spain: Samuel Ibn Nagrillah, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Moses Ibn Ezra, and Judah ha-Levi.

Medieval Hebrew poetry demands of the modern reader a monumental effort of patience and erudition; the language is difficult, the imagery highly allusive. This is particularly true of the poetry written in Spain, not least because the Bible was so well known there. As is evident from a variety of sources, knowledge of the Hebrew Bible by heart was far from uncommon, and not only among the highly educated. The most ordinary documents are replete with direct biblical citations and allusions. A text like the Song of Songs, elsewhere allegorically interpreted if cited at all, was commonly known in Spain and understood also on the literal level.² Even in the late fourteenth century, for example, Isaac b. Sheshet, rabbi of Saragossa, received a query about Song of Songs 1.2, “for your love is better than wine.” Every schoolchild knows the passage, he was told; why then was it necessary for Rabbi Akiva to be questioned about its meaning in the Talmud (*Avodah Zara* 29b)?³

* 2 Sam. 18.5

¹ “Jewish Reactions to ‘*Arabbiya* and the Renaissance of Hebrew in Spain,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* (forthcoming).

² See the commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra in standard editions of the rabbinical Hebrew Bible (i.e., with commentaries), and in the critical edition with English translation by Henry J. Mathews (London, 1874); and particularly Joseph b. Judah Ibn ‘Aqnin, *Hitgallot ha-sodot ve-hofe’at ha-meorot*, ed. (Judeo-Arabic) and trans. (Hebrew) A. S. Halkin (Jerusalem, 1964), a commentary that has undeservedly been ignored.

³ Responsa of Isaac b. Sheshet Perfet, No. 284.

The idiom of the Hebrew Bible must be thoroughly familiar to the student of the Hebrew poetry written in medieval Spain, and the biblical text itself must be supplemented by the many medieval Hebrew grammatical works and commentaries on the Bible, particularly those of Spanish provenance. It would be naive to assume that the meaning of the biblical allusions can be understood without reference to contemporary interpretations of the particular texts. Other sources pertinent to the poems are the Talmud and numerous midrashim. Finally, the Arabic influence on the Hebrew poets makes it imperative that the whole tradition of Arabic literature and the customs of medieval Muslim society be taken into consideration.

Possibly because of the difficulty of the task, surprisingly few scholars have turned their attention to the study of medieval Hebrew secular poetry (the religious poetry, in part because the language is easier by far, is something of a different story).⁴ Critical editions of the collected poetry (*divans*) of the major Hebrew poets have only recently begun to appear, following their discovery and the first efforts at publication in the second part of the nineteenth century. The secondary literature, even in Hebrew, is far from exhaustive, and in other languages there is a paucity of literature.⁵

Hebrew secular poetry emerged in Spain at the end of the tenth century under the influence of Arabic poetry. Both the meters and the themes of Arabic poetry were imitated, although the Hebrew poets soon surpassed their mentors in this respect, making use of a greater variety of meters and themes (they were not, of course, restricted by the conventions of Arabic poetry). No systematic attempt has yet been made to analyze the themes, or to distinguish the motifs and topoi, employed in medieval Hebrew poetry. At present, let it suffice merely to indicate some of the typical themes: panegyric, nature, wine drinking, separation from friends, poetry itself, apologies for an assumed insult, satire, debate, self-praise, humor, war, and love. The love poetry may be stylistically subdivided into self-contained poems, that is,

⁴ Some of the more important literature, in languages other than Hebrew, includes: Leopold Zunz, *Die synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1855; Frankfurt a. M., 1920); idem, *Literaturgeschichte der synagogalen Poesie* (Berlin, 1865); Ismar Elbogen, *Studien zur Geschichte des jüdischen Gottesdienstes* (Berlin, 1907) and *Der jüdische Gottesdienst* (Berlin, 1913, and repr.); Michael Sachs, *Die religiöse Poesie der Juden in Spanien* (Berlin, 1845; 1901); José María Millás Vallicrosa, *La poesía sagrada hebraicoespañola* (Madrid, 1940; 1948). English translations of some selected religious poems may be found in Judah ha-Levi, *Selected Poems*, trans. Nina Salaman (Philadelphia, 1928); *Selected Religious Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol*, trans. Israel Zangwill (Philadelphia, 1923); and Moses Ibn Ezra, *Selected Poems*, trans. Solomon Solis-Cohen (Philadelphia, 1945).

⁵ In English, one may consult Shalom Spiegel, "On Medieval Hebrew Poetry," in Louis Finkelstein, ed., *The Jews, Their History, Culture and Religion* (Philadelphia, 1949, and subsequent editions) 2:528–66; Jefim Schirmann, "The Function of the Hebrew Poet in Medieval Spain," *Jewish Social Studies* 16 (1954), 235–52; my own articles, such as "The 'Ubi Sunt' Theme in Medieval Hebrew Poetry," *Hebrew Studies* 19 (1978), 56–62; "Satire and Debate in Two Famous Medieval Poems from al-Andalus: Love of Boys vs. Girls, the Pen and Other Themes," *The Maghreb Review* 4 (1979), 105–13; "'Sacred' and 'Secular' in the Poetry of Ibn Gabirol," *Hebrew Studies* 20–21 (1979–80), 75–79; and "The Lyric Tradition in Hebrew Secular Poetry of Medieval Spain," *The Hispanic Journal* 2 (1981), 7–26.

poems the entire subject of which is love, and the so-called “erotic” introductions (Arabic *naṣīb*) to an ode or eulogy (Arabic *qaṣīda*). Thematically, they are divided into those dealing with love of girls or young women and those dealing with love of boys.

It was Jefim (Ḥayyim) Schirmann who, continuing the pioneering work of Heinrich Brody in the publication and study of this poetry, first pointed out the theme of love of boys in Hebrew poetry.⁶ His rather cautious treatment of the subject provoked an immediate reaction, and some of his critics refused to acknowledge that such a theme, so common in classical Greek and in medieval Muslim and Christian poetry, could exist in Hebrew verse.⁷

An apparently serious objection which has been urged, and the only one which merits consideration here, is the lack of any reference to activity involving sexual contact with boys in the responsa (legal rabbinic) literature of Spain. However, there are several things to be considered in this regard. In the first place, the state of the texts of the responsa as they have come down to us (at least, in printed editions) is such that they often lack the precise details most of interest to the historian, such as the names of people and cities and the particular details of the case being discussed. Thus, it is often difficult to know specifically what is being reported. Furthermore, the editors of the collections of responsa tended to include only those which had continuous relevance as legal precedent. Cases that appeared too specific and limited in scope might well have been excluded from such collections. Finally, the fact is that we have almost no responsa at all from the period of Muslim Spain in which our poetry was written.

In spite of all this, it is nevertheless not true that the surviving responsa contain no references to such activity. In a responsum which is undoubtedly (for reasons that cannot be detailed here) from Joseph Ibn Abitur, a rabbi in Spain and himself a poet, the case of a *kohen* (priest) who had been removed from his office as a cantor due to his lascivious conduct with Gentile prostitutes and even with Jewish women is discussed. At first, the elders of the congregation paid no attention to the reports about him, but finally his reputation increased so that the Gentiles were ridiculing him and them. It was also reported that he had sexual relations with an adolescent boy (*na'ar*, “youth”). It is apparent from the report that it was not his activity with the boy that caused his removal, but rather his general reputation as one who had illicit contacts with women. Indeed, in his reply Ibn Abitur, who upholds the decision to remove him from office, does not even refer to the incident with the boy.⁸

⁶ “The Ephebe in Medieval Hebrew Poetry,” *Sefarad* 15 (1955), 55–68.

⁷ E.g., Nehemiah Allony, “ha-Ševi ve-ha-gamal be-shirat Sefarad,” *Ošar Yehudei Sefarad* 4 (1961), 16–43, and “The ‘Zevi’ in the Hebrew Poetry in Spain,” *Sefarad* 23 (1963), 311–21. On the other hand, Eliyahu Ashtor accepts the existence of this theme in poetry; see his *Qorot ha-yehudim bi-Sefarad ha-muslamit* (Jerusalem, 1966) 1:256 and 258 (English translation, *The Jews of Moslem Spain* [Philadelphia, 1973] 1:396 and 399).

⁸ *Teshuvot geonei mizrah u-ma'arav*, ed. Joel Müller (Berlin, 1888), p. 41, No. 171.

This is not the only evidence we have of the reality of this activity among medieval Jews. There is a statement in Hayya Gaon's poem, cited by Schirmann.⁹ Furthermore, in the controversy between Sa'adyah Gaon and the exilarch David b. Zakkai (tenth century), Khalaf Ibn Sarjada accused the gaon of homosexual acts, even in the presence of the sacred scriptures, and stated that the youth of Nehardea (in Iraq) had wearied themselves in pursuing him (cf. Isaiah 58.13 for the meaning of this expression).¹⁰ Khalaf, it should be noted, was an important dignitary who sat in the first row of the yeshivah (academy) at Pumbedita and later became its gaon, and his accusations against Sa'adyah were based on reliable testimony which the latter never attempted to refute, although he carefully refuted all the other charges against him.¹¹

Aside from the previously mentioned sources, medieval Hebrew poetry appears to be the only evidence we have for the love of boys among the Jews. Jewish law, of course, followed the Bible in condemning homosexual intercourse among adult males. The punishment was death, and even though the death penalty was normally suspended among Jews following the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., in Spain the death penalty continued in effect for many offenses. The chief talmudic source for the prohibition is Sanhedrin 54b, and this is followed closely by Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot issurei biah*, ch. 1, hal. 14. If the intercourse was with a boy nine years of age or older (to age thirteen, when he is an adult), the adult male was punishable and the boy exempt. If the boy was under nine, both the adult and child were exempt — but Maimonides adds that the court should punish the adult with lashes. While technically the prohibition, therefore, applies only to anal intercourse, it should be noted that there is a general prohibition against

⁹ "The Ephebe," p. 64 (the important story which Schirmann discusses following this quotation is to be found in vol. 3 of *Ginzey Schechter*, not "Vol. II," which is a misprint in his note 29). Schirmann's reading, translation, and interpretation of the line in the poem are absolutely correct, and all of Allony's objections over the years are groundless.

¹⁰ Abraham Harkavy, *Zikharon le-rishonim* 5, 230, cited by Ellis Rivkin, "The Saadia-David ben Zakkai Controversy," in Meir Ben-Horin et al., eds., *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman* (Leiden, 1962), p. 418.

¹¹ Sa'adyah devotes chapter four of the tenth article of his *Kitāb al-amanāt wa-l-'iṭiqādāt* (*Emunot ve-de'ot*) to a discussion of passion (*ishq*). There he mentions the views of those who believe that if the "ascendant zodiacal sign" (cf. Abraham bar Hayya, *Megillat ha-megalleh*, ed. Julius Guttmann, p. 120) of two men is equal, then their loving each other is astrologically determined. In spite of the fact that he rejects these views in strong terms, it is interesting that he uses as an example of erotic passion two males; even in his refutation he says that if this view were correct, it would not be possible that Zayd ("Reuben") would love 'Amr ("Shimeon"), but rather both would love each other equally (see the new critical edition of the Judeo-Arabic text with Hebrew translation by Yosef Kafih [Jerusalem, 1969], pp. 301–2; the first edition of the medieval Hebrew translation by Judah Ibn Tibbon, *Sefer ha-emunot ve-ha-de'ot* [Constantinople, 1562; repr. Jerusalem, 1972], pp. 158–59; the English translation by S. Rosenblatt, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* [New Haven, Conn., 1948], p. 373 ff. I was not able to compare the original edition of the Arabic text by Landauer [Leiden, 1880], but this is unnecessary in view of Kafih's new edition. I am grateful to Prof. John Boswell for calling this passage to my attention.)

"emission of semen in vain" in any manner (*ibid.*, ch. 21, hal. 18). Maimonides, here as elsewhere, followed his own rather severe attitudes regarding sexual activity of any kind, but nevertheless based his rulings for the most part on talmudic authority.¹² The question of the extent to which Maimonides' code was strictly enforced in al-Andalus cannot, of course, be readily answered. Furthermore, a great deal of our poetry was written in the period before Maimonides produced his code. Yet it must be emphasized that while there are some apparent allusions, in none of the Hebrew poetry so far discovered are there any actual references to sexual activity other than kissing. On the other hand, Arabic poetry from the same period, country, and general social environment is full of explicit sexual acts with boys.

The phenomenon of older males being attracted to adolescent boys is attested to in many societies throughout history. K. J. Dover has observed that "a society in which young men pursue their juniors for a period of some years before 'settling down' in marriage is by no means unimaginable."¹³ Ancient Greece was one such society (although the activity was by no means exclusively confined to young or unmarried men pursuing adolescent boys).¹⁴ For the medieval Christian world, in addition to the poetry which has long been known, we now have a very important study.¹⁵ Unfortunately, there is no comparable study of this phenomenon in medieval Islam (including the Jewish aspect), and the most readily available references are still the Arabic poetry and literature of various Muslim countries.¹⁶

The ancient Greeks produced poetry describing their passion for boys, often as scatological in nature as the later Arabic poetry.¹⁷ The temptation would be great to assume that the Muslim poets "borrowed" this theme as a mere literary device from the Greeks, just as it has been suggested that the Jews "borrowed" it from the Muslims, but for the fact that the Muslims had absolutely no awareness of the existence of Greek poetry.¹⁸ In this respect, at

¹² Michael Goodich, *The Unmentionable Vice: Homosexuality in the Later Middle Ages* (Santa Barbara, 1978), pp. 46–49, gives an adequate summary of Jewish law, although he is incorrect on some details regarding Maimonides; it must be objected *contra* Goodich, p. 48, that the Jewish tradition did *not* condemn homosexuality, etc., as "sins against nature."

¹³ "Eros and Nomos," *University of London Institute of Classical Studies Bulletin* 11 (1964), 31.

¹⁴ See K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978). Even Dover's work does not by any means exhaust the literary and historical sources.

¹⁵ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago, 1980).

¹⁶ Some specific examples of these will be cited below. See also Boswell, *Christianity*, pp. 194–200 (who is mistaken in saying, p. 195 n. 96, that contemporary Spanish translators of Muslim poetry from al-Andalus "almost invariably" suppress the homosexual meaning of the poetry. Nor is his statement accurate that al-Maqqari is the "chief source" of this poetry [p. 196 n. 101]). An important anthology, of which Boswell seems unaware, is referred to in n. 34 below.

¹⁷ Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, pp. 57–59, gives a less-than-satisfactory sketch; see for further details *The Greek Anthology* in the Loeb Classical Library edition by W. R. Paton.

¹⁸ Although this is now accepted by all students of medieval Arabic poetry, it is true that Gustav von Grunebaum, in an early article, "Greek Form Elements in the Arabian Nights,"

least, Arno Karlen was sensible in his observation that "homosexuality is not an infectious disease, and people who do not practice it are unlikely to borrow it from military invaders, like children presented with an irresistible sweet."¹⁹

In medieval Christian Europe, too, pederasty — sexual attraction to adolescent boys — was not uncommon.²⁰ This is also reflected in the poetry, examples of which are a famous poem by the monk Gottschalk and the poem to which Curtius refers as one of the pearls of medieval poetry, addressed to a boy who has abandoned the poet (a priest) for his rival. Particularly noteworthy are the closing lines:

Joy that was mine is my rival's tomorrow,
While I for my fawn [*cerva*] like a stricken deer sorrow!²¹

This uses, without any question of "borrowing," the precise image ("fawn") used for the boy in Arabic and Hebrew poetry. Of interest, too, is a letter from Walafrid Strabo to Bodo when the boy was studying at the court at Aix-la-Chapelle, which closes with the tender words: "Farewell, dear fair one, always and everywhere most beloved, my little blonde lad, my blonde little lad."²² Bodo later converted to Judaism and fled to Spain.

Medieval cathedrals were decorated frequently with carved reliefs and

Journal of the American Oriental Society 62 (1942), 277–92, conjectured that there were possible Greek influences on some of the motifs in the "Arabian Nights." He was only able to make some very conjectural comparisons, however. Nor can his supposition (p. 283) that some "Hellenistic love conception" contributed ("probably") to pre-Islamic poetry be taken as proof of an otherwise unsubstantiated claim. In any event, whatever a "Hellenistic love conception" is supposed to be, it does not dislodge the fact that Muslim poets knew nothing of Greek poetry (nor does von Grunebaum claim otherwise). Cf. Adolph Schack, *Poesía y arte de los Arabes en España y Sicilia*, trans. Juan Valera (Buenos Aires, n.d.), p. 77; S. A. Bonebakker, "Aspects of the History of Literary Rhetoric and Poetics in Arabic Literature," *Viator* 1 (1970), 75–95; and William Heinrichs, "Literary Theory: The Problem of Its Efficiency," in G. E. von Grunebaum, ed., *Arabic Poetry, Theory and Development* (Wiesbaden, 1973), p. 42; and Vicente Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age* (Leiden, 1975), p. 65.

¹⁹ "The Homosexual Heresy," *Chaucer Review* 6 (1971), 45; similarly, Boswell, *Christianity*, p. 52.

²⁰ Throughout chapter seven of Boswell's book, as well as in earlier sections, there are frequent specific references to sex with adolescent boys. An important source for Visigothic Spain, overlooked by Boswell, is the *Regula* of St. Leandro, bishop of Seville (ca. 536–600); Julio Campos Ruiz, ed. and trans., *San Leandro, San Isidoro, San Fructuoso: Reglas monásticas de la España visigoda* . . . (Madrid, 1971), pp. 39–40. On the distinction between pederasty and pedophilia, see Boswell, *Christianity*, p. 139 n. 8.

²¹ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1953), pp. 114–15; note the other poems there and on p. 116. Gottschalk's "Ut quid iubes, pusiole" is in Frederick Brittain, *The Medieval Latin and Romance Lyric to A.D. 1300*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Eng., 1951), pp. 83–85, and in Boswell, *Christianity*, p. 192. (Boswell conveniently provides texts and excellent translations of several such poems, p. 370 ff.)

²² MGH Poet 2:386; translated by Allen Cabaniss in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 43 (1952), 315. See Boswell, *Christianity*, pp. 30 and 191–92, in light of which there can hardly be any doubt as to the nature of this letter (although it was apparently unknown to Boswell).

paintings or stained glass windows of lecherous priests and others in various stages of undress, and the cathedral apse of an abbey in Savoy (near Geneva) has a fresco portraying sodomy. Other homosexual scenes are not uncommon.²³ Muslims, too, may have at least symbolically depicted their preferences. A pillar of the Alhambra palace in Granada has on its base a bas-relief which in fact comes from Cordoba during the caliphal period; the original inscription has been replaced by one indicating that Badis took it for his palace in Granada (which means that Samuel Ibn Nagrillah undoubtedly saw it, and perhaps his son Yūsuf brought it to the Alhambra). The figures represented are gazelles being mounted by lions. Castejón, who has reproduced the figures in his article on them, notes the "vaguely anthropomorphic aspect" of the lions with their heavy mustaches.²⁴ The lion is, of course, a universal symbol for royalty and aristocracy, and the position of the animals certainly suggests sexual imagery.

Among the Muslims, hashish, together with wine (which was not then prohibited to the Muslims), was often used to aid in the seduction of reluctant boys; even more frequently it was used by boys trying to seduce men. There were special localities in Cairo, and no doubt elsewhere, where boys could readily be picked up. Also, there was the custom of *dabīb* ("creeping"), that is, attacking sleeping boys in public caravan resting places. Somewhat like the famous verse of the *Rhubiyat* is the verse attributed to Abū Nuwās:

A handful of hashish, a pound of meat,
A kilo of bread, and the company of a willing boy.²⁵

Arabic poetry, particularly of the earlier period, was often conventional and filled with clichés. Yet there is much to be commended in the view of Andras Hamori, who specifically denies that these were mere "ossified metaphors" of formula, arguing that the erotic metaphors function both to establish a reality and to transport the mind into a "shadowy world" of poetic perception.²⁶ This is particularly relevant to the *nasīb*, or "erotic prologue," of the *qaṣīda* ("ode"). In an early study on Arabic love poetry, Blachère concluded that it is possible, though by no means certain, that the erotic themes

²³ See James Cleugh, *Love Locked Out: A Survey of Love, License and Restriction in the Middle Ages* (London, 1963), pp. 22–26, and also the illustrations in Boswell, following p. 206, Nos. 7 and 8. There is still no adequate survey of this theme in medieval art, sculpture, and iconography.

²⁴ Rafael Castejón, "La nueva pila de Alamiñá y las representaciones zoomorfas califales," *Boletín de la Real Academia de ciencias, bellas letras y nobles artes de Córdoba* 16 (1945), 198; see also E. Lévi-Provençal, *Inscriptions arabes d'Espagne* (Leiden, 1931), p. 199; and A. R. Nykl, "Inscripciones árabes de la Alhambra y del Generalife," *Al-Andalus* 4 (1936), 446. Samuel and his son were both prime ministers of Granada, and the latter built the original Alhambra. (Although referred to in Hebrew poems as "Yehosef," the name of Ibn Nagrillah's son was Yūsuf, and he is so called in all the sources.)

²⁵ Franz Rosenthal, *The Herb: Hashish versus Medieval Muslim Society* (Leiden, 1971), pp. 66, 67, 82, 83; see also the poem on page 157.

²⁶ *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton, 1974), pp. 74–75. Some interesting examples of this type of poetry are translated and discussed there; see, e.g., pp. 102, 107.

of these prologues are merely literary devices.²⁷ Yet it is certain that even the earliest period of Islamic Arabic poetry had examples of real homosexual poetry.²⁸ With poetry of the later period, and certainly in the poetry of al-Andalus, there is no longer any possible doubt as to the authentic nature of the activity so graphically (and pornographically) described: one entire anthology of poetry from al-Andalus is devoted exclusively to the love of boys.²⁹ Al-Jāḥiẓ had originally held the view that *'ishq* ("passion, lust") could only be applied to the love of women, but later he seems to have changed his mind and allowed it also for the love of boys, provided that the element of passion was really present.³⁰ He also tells us that the price for young boy slaves was so high because of the *'ishq* of the purchasers, who sometimes sold their property to acquire a particularly desirable boy.³¹

The earliest examples of this kind of poetry vary from the relatively chaste and even fearful expression of desire to the kind of scatology so characteristic of Andalusian poetry of the later era. An example of the first kind is a poem by Saif al-Daula, ruler of Aleppo and patron of the poet al-Mutanabbi (948–957):

I kissed him [a boy] in fear as
A bird drinks in fear.
It sees water and wants it
Fearing the result of fear
And seizes occasion and comes
But does not enjoy in fear.³²

A poem by Abū Nuwās, actually less explicit than much of his work, is an example of the second kind. I quote only the opening lines:

My penis settled on the behind of Sam'ān
It wanted hospitality, that had two sides.
I never had a host better at hosting than
The behind of the boy Sam'ān.³³

²⁷ R. Blachère, "La poésie érotique au siècle des Umayyades de Damas," (Algiers, Université Institut d'études orientales: *Annales* 5 (1939–41), 111.

²⁸ E.g., the ninth-century poet Di'bil b. 'Alī: "'Alī's penis is his tool, and Amr's anus his mistress. / At times he encounters a dart, and at other times a quiver" (Leon Zolondek, ed. and trans., *Di'bil b. 'Alī* [Lexington, Kentucky, 1961], pp. 21, 97 [No. 37]).

²⁹ Ibn Sana al-Mulk, *Dar al-tiraz*; some of the less explicit of these poems are translated in Linda Fish Compton, *Andalusian Lyrical Poetry and Old Spanish Love Songs* (New York, 1976).

³⁰ Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The Development of a Genre* (New York, 1971), p. 86; al-Jāḥiẓ, "Risāla al-qiṣṣa," trans. Charles Pellat in *Arabica* 10 (1963), 140. Unfortunately, Giffen does not discuss the theme of boys at all, except to call attention to an important collection (apparently still in manuscript) of Ibn Abī Hajala (14th century), which includes stories of the men of this time "who were sorely afflicted with love through seeing a woman or a boy" (pp. 135–36).

³¹ Charles Pellat, "Les esclaves — Chanteuses de Ġaḥiẓ," *Arabica* 10 (1963), 138.

³² *Dhikra Saif al-Daula*, trans. Arthur Wormhoudt (Oskaloosa, Iowa, 1975), p. 16.

³³ *Diwan*, trans. Arthur Wormhoudt (Oskaloosa, Iowa, 1974), pp. 80–81.

Andalusian Arabic poetry, however, offers the most complete representation of this genre. Among the numerous examples that could be cited, two are here presented. The first is by Muḥammad Ibn Mālīk, secretary to Muḥammad b. Saʿd, king of Murcia (1124–1172):

I saw a shapely youth in the mosque,
 beautiful as the moon when it comes out.
 Those who see him bending to pray say:
 "All my desires are that he prostrate himself."³⁴

The metaphor of "moon" or "sun" to describe the beautiful boy or woman, a cliché of Arabic verse, was borrowed by the Hebrew poets. The second poem is by Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Gālīb al-Ruṣāʿī (Valencia, d. 1177):

He is a little gazelle [*ghuzayyil*] whose fingers
 do not cease to play in spinning [*ghazl*], as
 My thoughts do not cease, in seeing him,
 to play with erotic poetry [*ghazal*].³⁵

The triple paronomasia of this poem about a weaving boy serves as a reminder of the close association in Arabic between the word for erotic poetry (*ghazal*) and the word for gazelle (*ghazāl*), which was a term of endearment for the beloved boy in Arabic poetry. The gazelle imagery may well have come from the Bible, Song of Songs 2.9 (the Bible, of course, was available in Arabic translation to the Muslims). Furthermore, I would suggest that the Hebrew term *ševi*, "gazelle," used for the beloved boy in Hebrew poetry, carried connotations of the Song of Songs, of Arabic *ghazal/ghazāl*, and also of Arabic *šabī*, "boy." In other words, to the Arabic-speaking Jew of al-Andalus, the word *ševi* in a poem immediately brought to mind the ideas "boy" and "erotic poem."

This is not the place for an extensive discussion of the metaphors of Arabic poetry about boys, but mention should be made of one other important element, the link between love and wine. Generally, this is found in one of two forms: the boy is a cupbearer (*sāqī*), or the boy is given wine to drink at a party with the hope that he will become drunk and so give up his resistance to the advances of his would-be lover. Contrary to popular mis-

³⁴ Alī ibn Mūsā Ibn Saʿd al-Maghribī, *El libro de las banderas de los campeones*, ed. and trans. Emilio García Gómez (Madrid, 1942), p. 245 (my translation here). This important anthology of Arabic poetry of al-Andalus has many examples of such poetry. The abridged and bowdlerized version by A. J. Arberry, *Moorish Poetry* (Cambridge, Eng., 1953) gives little indication of the nature of the work.

³⁵ Ibid.; these lines are quoted also by al-Shaḥundī, *Risāla*, trans. Emilio García Gómez, *Elogio del Islam español* (Madrid-Granada, 1934), p. 77 (my translation). Other examples of love poetry about boys may be found in A. R. Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry* (Baltimore, 1946), and James Monroe, ed. and trans. *Hispano-Arabic Poetry* (Berkeley, 1974). Neither Nykl nor Monroe included any of the more scatological poems found in Ibn Saʿd's anthology (n. 34 above).

conception, the drinking of wine was not always considered a sin in Islam; even where it was, the prohibition was frequently violated.³⁶

Jews drank wine and engaged in wine parties exactly as did the Muslims, often together with them. Jewish law prohibited, however, the drinking of wine touched by a Gentile (lest it be defiled by use for idolatrous libations). In this regard, a responsum of Maimonides is of interest. He mentions that it was the practice of the great rabbi Joseph ha-Levi Ibn Megash and many other great scholars of Spain to mix honey into their wine when Muslims joined them to drink, so that the wine would be unfit for libations and thus be exempted from the law.³⁷ This was perhaps the practice followed by Samuel Ibn Nagrillah, an otherwise generally observant Jew who is known to have drunk wine with Muslims.

Relationships between Muslims, Jews, and Christians were not always hostile in the Middle Ages, and certainly passion knew no religious limits. Thus, we find that al-Ramādī (b. ca. 926) was in love with a Christian boy, and even wore the belt (*zunnār*) prescribed for Christians and made the sign of the cross over wine before he drank it. Abū Nuwās also was in love with a Christian boy, and wrote:

If only I were the priest, or the metropolitan
of his church, or else his Gospel and Bible;
Or if only I were the sacrifice he offers
or his cup of wine, or a bubble in the wine.

Another such poem deserves further comment here:

I visited his bed just before morning, when dawn
had been announced by the sound of gongs.⁽¹⁾
He said: "Who is it?" I said: "The priest has
come to visit; your monastery⁽²⁾ must have
the ministrations of priests."⁽³⁾ ³⁸

(1) Clappers of wood (see Prendergast's note).

(2) Or "convent" (*dawar*), with obscene connotations.

(3) *Wa-lā buddun li-dayriha min tashmīsi qissīsi*. As Prendergast observed, the poet has used the Hebrew *tashmish* (< *shamash*, "to serve"), which means "to have intercourse" in rabbinic Hebrew (cf. *Berakhot* 8a; *Yoma* 73b).

³⁶ There are several articles on this subject; see especially E. Yarshater, "The Theme of Wine-Drinking and the Concept of the Beloved in Early Persian Poetry," *Studia Islamica* 13 (1960), 43–53. In G. Marcais, "Les figures d'hommes et de bêtes," *Mélanges d'histoire et d'archéologie musulman* 1 (1951), 83 ff., may be seen sculptured figures of Muslim noblemen with slaves (?) pouring wine, and also various illustrations of lute and other instrument players and male and female dancers.

³⁷ *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Alfred (Abraham) Freimann (Jerusalem, 1934), No. 382.

³⁸ For al-Ramādī, Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, p. 59; complete translation of Abū Nuwās in Hamori, *Art*, pp. 120, 123–24. The second poem is cited in Badi' al-Zamān al-Hamadhāni, *Maqāmāt*, trans. W. J. Prendergast (London, 1915; rept. 1973), p. 140, which Hamori apparently did not see. Prendergast's notes are important.

Schirmann has also discussed examples of Arabic love poetry written about Jewish boys in al-Andalus, and in this article I shall present instances of Hebrew verse about Muslim boys (because of which, and indeed generally in our poetry, it is impossible to agree with Schirmann's statement that "we have no evidence that any of [this] verse reflects personal experiences").³⁹

This is the background against which the Hebrew *ševi* poetry, the theme of which is the love of boys, must be seen. Before beginning a discussion of what is necessarily a small representative sample of these poems, it is perhaps appropriate to say a word about their interpretation. All of the translations are my own. Because the study of these texts is so difficult, and the field as a whole so relatively new, there is little solid tradition to guide us. Almost none of the traditions of European literary criticism can be validly applied to the interpretation of medieval Hebrew poetry, and the only real assistance comes from the study done on Arabic poetry. The notes, often extensive, of the editors of the Hebrew texts are of course helpful, but often one reluctantly comes to the conclusion that they are wrong or that another interpretation is possible. The translator of this poetry is faced with the extremely difficult task of attempting to render the verse into a language completely different from the original. Having no pretensions to being a poet, I have chosen to err on the side of literalism and to provide translations that reproduce as faithfully as possible what the original Hebrew text says. Explanations are provided in notes only where absolutely necessary, with full realization that additional or different interpretations are sometimes possible. Yet there can be no doubt as to the overall intention of the poems or, I believe, the accuracy of the translations within the limits of language. I take as my motto the apology of a great medieval Hebrew grammarian:

I do not say that in all which I have mentioned the understanding of it is withheld from someone else and that no one has approached it but me. For the words which I have explained can sustain other explanations. Furthermore, it is possible to give an explanation which has not been revealed to me but has been revealed to others.⁴⁰

Apparently the first Hebrew poet to have written a poem in this genre was Yišhaq ben Mar-Saul (Lucena, eleventh century). Schirmann, who first edited a fragment of the poem and later the complete text, observed that the term *ševi* ("gazelle") is not to be explained as a synonym for the feminine form *ševiah*, as is sometimes but rarely the case in Hebrew poetry, for here "the poet compares his beloved to men known from biblical stories —

³⁹ Schirmann, "The Ephebe," p. 66.

⁴⁰ Abū Zakharya (Yaḥya) b. Daūd (Yehudah Hayyuj), in Neḥemiah Allony's introduction to the reprint edition of P. Kokovsov, *Mi-sifrei ha-balshanut ha-ivrit bi-yemei ha-beinayim* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 11, lines 9–12.

Joseph, Adoniah, David; and from this it is evident that the *sevi* here is also a male.”⁴¹ Following is my translation, based on Schirmann’s final edition:

Gazelle desired in Spain,⁽¹⁾
wondrously formed,
Given rule and dominion
over every living thing;⁽²⁾
Lovely of form like the moon
with beautiful stature:
Curls of purple⁽³⁾
upon shining⁽⁴⁾ temple,
Like Joseph in his form,
like Adoniah⁽⁵⁾ his hair.
Lovely of eyes like David,⁽⁶⁾
he has slain me like Uriah.
He has enflamed my passions
and consumed my heart with fire.
Because of him I have been left
without understanding and wisdom.
Weep with me every ostrich
and every hawk and falcon!
The beloved of my soul has slain me —
is this a just sentence?
.....
Because of him my soul is sick,
perplexed and yearning.
His speech upon my heart
is like dew upon parched land.
Draw me from the pit of destruction
that I go not down to hell!⁽⁷⁾

(1) *Ispamiah* (“Spain”) rather than *Sefarad*.

(2) Hebrew: male and female living thing.

(3) I.e., beautiful (cf. Song of Songs 7.6 and the commentaries).

(4) *Peninyah*, a word coined from *peninim* (“pearls,” or jewels generally, in medieval Hebrew). The meaning here seems to be “shining” or “pure.” Ibn Gabirol borrowed the term in his *Keter malkhut* (*Selected Religious Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol*, p. 101, line 297; Schirmann, *ha-Shirah ha-’Ivrit bi-Sefarad u-vi-Provens* [Jerusalem, 1954], 1:271, line 234).

(5) A son of David; Ibn Janah, a student of the poet, explained that this means here Absalom, who was famous for his fine hair.

(6) Cf. 1 Sam. 16.12 and the line by the Muslim poet Ibn Khafājah (Valencia, 1058–1139) describing a beautiful boy: “See Joseph in his clothing, lovely of form / and hear David singing in him.”⁴²

(7) See Isa. 38.17 for this expression.

⁴¹ Schirmann, *Shirim ḥadashim min ha-genizah* (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 157; cf. Schirmann’s earlier article “Yiṣḥaq ben Mar Shaul ha-meshorer mi-Lusinah” in M. D. Cassuto, et al., eds., *Sefer Assaf* (Jerusalem, 1946), p. 513.

⁴² Cited by Judah Ratzaby, “Shirat ha-yayin le-R’ Shemuel ha-nagid,” in H. Z. Hirschberg, et al., eds., *Sefer H. M. Shapiro* (Bar Ilan University) *Sefer ha-shanah* 9 (1972), 442 n. 135. The motif

Already contained in this poem are many of the images that were standard in both the Arabic and Hebrew poems, nearly any of which could be selected at random for comparison. Typical are these lines by 'Abdallāh, one of the sons of the Cordoba caliph 'Abd al-Raḥmān II:

My woes come from a dark-eyed fawn:
His kind makes men lose self-control!
His cheeks are like a blooming rose
Mixed with sunbeams and lily white;
His body is lithe like a bough of *bān*.⁽¹⁾
In his bright eye a dark pupil turns:
To him I pledge my purest love,
So long as night alternates with days!⁴³

(1) The ben-tree, which is tall and fragrant.

In both poems there is present also the theme of "love-sickness"; the passion of the lover for his beloved, especially when unrequited, nearly drives him mad.⁴⁴

Another early example is by the great scholar Yosef Ibn Ṣaddiq (born in Cordoba ca. 1075; died there 1149). He was religious judge (*dayyan*) of Cordoba all of his life and the author of an important philosophical work.⁴⁵ The poem is one of the numerous Hebrew *muwashshahāt*, with the final couplet (*kharja*) in Romance or in Arabic.⁴⁶

Desire remains in the heart like fire
Because of the eyes of a beloved ever since I first saw him.
As he hates my soul, I hate it,
For it is the counsel of wickedness to love what the gazelle hates!
My beloved does not favor me when I speak
Graciously to him,⁽¹⁾ and answers me harshly; when I kiss his foot
He only afflicts me without cause, but my heart will not
Consider it to him a trespass that he has afflicted.⁽²⁾
Lo, I am sold to you, my fawn, without redemption.⁽³⁾
Take a present — my heart — and do not in vain tread⁽⁴⁾
On me, until I drink from your palate the honey I shall take.⁽⁵⁾
Also when I thirst, I find coolness in your saliva.

of Joseph as the ultimate symbol of the beautiful young man in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian sources is the subject of a separate study, which I hope to do in the near future.

⁴³ Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, p. 22.

⁴⁴ Space does not permit a lengthy discussion of this motif; cf. briefly Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, p. 123, and note also the interesting observation of Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago, 1963), p. 627 (3.51). In Abū Nuwās's aforementioned poem about the Christian boy, the opening line is: "My body is diseased, gaunt with grief, while my heart flutters, blazing like fire" (Hamori, *Art*, p. 120).

⁴⁵ *'Olam qatan*, ed. S. Horovitz (Breslau, 1903).

⁴⁶ See on this S. M. Stern, *Hispano-Arabic Strophic Poetry* (Oxford, 1974), especially p. 78 ff., and p. 120 for the *kharja*.

This alone is my sun — the beloved who has enslaved my heart;
 From being free, he has pierced my heart and profaned it.⁽⁶⁾
 My soul knows that in you to slay me there was no
 Guile, but God brought it to your hand.⁽⁷⁾
 From weeping for brothers the tears on my cheeks⁽⁸⁾
 Descend moistly, warm like the coals of a furnace.
 Please let the wretched one couch among apple trees,⁽⁹⁾ and to
 the pomegranate
 Of a maiden's breast for a shield direct my heart.⁽¹⁰⁾
 The day when at her door the gazelle⁽¹¹⁾ waits and knocks,
 In the chamber of her dwelling she lifts her voice, and leans
 Upon her that bore her⁽¹²⁾ — I am not able to restrain myself.
 "What shall I do, Mamma?
 My beloved stands before the gate!"^{(13) 47}

- (1) Cf. Prov. 26.25. Paronomasia: *yehannēni* ("favor me"), *aḥannēn* ("speak graciously").
- (2) Paronomasia: *ya'neni* ("he answers me"), *yea'nneni* ("he afflicts me"). Is there an allusion to Deut. 21.14 here? The next line seems to make this a certainty.
- (3) Cf. Lev. 19.20!
- (4) Or: "subdue."
- (5) "Drink" in the sense of become drunk. Paronomasia: *tirddeh* ("tread"), *erddeh* ("take", as Judg. 14.9, cf. Targum); *eshkar* ("present"), *eshkar* ("I drink").
- (6) As the ear of a perpetual slave is pierced (Ex. 21.6); "profaned," possibly because the poet was a Levite?
- (7) The boy did not intend this suffering; it was accidental.
- (8) Bdehllium; there is a whole series of paronomasia here: *bedolahim* ("bdehllium," tears), *lehi* ("cheek"), *lahim* ("moistly").
- (9) Song of Songs 2.5; as Schirmann observed, the poet proposes to find comfort from his frustrated pursuit of the boy with a woman.
- (10) Paronomasia and contrast: *šinnah* ("shield"), *šinnah* (line 12, "coolness"; cf. Prov. 25.13).
- (11) The poet himself is here referred to as a "gazelle," a lover.
- (12) Cf., perhaps, Song of Songs 6.9. This leads up to her "song" to her mother in the *kharja*.
- (13) Spanish and Arabic: "Que faray mamma? / Meu'l habib estad yana!" (*yana*, "gate" in Mozarabic). For another poem, also a *muwashshah*, that similarly combines praise of a beautiful boy and a woman and her "gazelle" (lover), see the Arabic poem by al-Abyad, ed. and trans. S. M. Stern, *Al-Andalus* 23 (1958), 353–54.

Samuel Ibn Nagrillah (993–1056) was one of the most creative and prolific of the Hebrew poets of Spain. A large section of his *Divan*, in the fine edition by Dov Jarden, contains love poetry. However, poems in which the subject is the beloved boy (*sevi*) or girl (*seviah*) are to be found elsewhere in the *Divan* as well. The total number of poems in the first category is twenty (including one poem not in Jarden's edition), and in the second category, eighteen. It cannot, of course, be concluded from this that the poet necessarily loved boys more than girls or women, but it does represent a slight bias

⁴⁷ Schirmann, *ha-Shirah ha-Tvrit*, 1:547–48 (No. 2).

towards the former in the poems written. A sampling of these poems follows.

- Lovely gazelle, heaven-sent blessing
 on earth,⁽¹⁾ remove me from the snare.⁽²⁾
 Satisfy me with beneficence⁽³⁾ from your tongue,
 like a jar⁽⁴⁾ filled with good wine.
 What advantage have you that you crush hearts,
 with shining face and dark hair,
 And roving⁽⁵⁾ eye, black as night,
 on ruddy cheek?
- 5 How do you ply your craft upon the feelings
 and hearts — without knowing craft?⁽⁶⁾
 You prevail over heroes, and not with weapons,
 and over swords, without an army.
 You cure the mortally wounded without medicine
 or any healing on the wound.
 Tell me, is there an end to your roaming,
 and how long? How, oh how
 Can you stand among friends and shoot them
 with your arrows and bent bow?
- 10 And how can you choose death for the righteous,
 when their life or death is in your hands?
 You exult in their ills like an enemy —
 why does one like you do so?
- 48

(1) Or, "May God make you a blessing on earth," according to the interpretation of Judah Ratzaby in *Tarbiz* 43 (1973), 186.

(2) The snare of passion in which he has trapped the poet.

(3) I.e., his saliva. The Hebrew *šedaqah* is similar to Arabic *šadaqa* ("gift, charity") and also to *šadāqa* ("friendship").

(4) Jarden understands *šapihit* as intending *šapaḥat* ("jar, flask"). On the other hand, *šapihit* can mean "nectar" according to some, in which case the line might mean: "like nectar mixed in wine" (sweet). It is hard to imagine Samuel making the error suggested by Jarden.

(5) Correcting *kebokhah* (meaningless) to *nebukhah* ("wandering astray"). Jarden, of course, is unable to explain the nonexistent word, whereas the rhyme structure requires a word ending in *-ukhah*.

(6) "Feelings," literally, "inward parts," the seat of emotion. The boy is too young to be suspected of intentionally enticing his lovers.

This poem is of the type known as *qaṣīda*, or panegyric ode, written in honor of some famous person or patron of the poet. Unfortunately we cannot determine who was honored in this poem, which is of importance in the history of Samuel's activities. The usual transition verse, which subtly shifts from the opening section, the *nasīb* or love poem, to the real subject of the poem is strangely missing here. In its place are the famous lines:

⁴⁸ *Divan Shemuel ha-nagid*, ed. Dov Jarden (Jerusalem, 1966), pp. 221–22 (No. 75).

My friends, hear my poem; my soul,
 you know, clings to the fear of God.
 And its meaning is like that of Solomon's
 "My beloved is radiant" and "eyes like pools."

The reference is to Song of Songs 5.10 and 7.4, and it is this which has misled many scholars into thinking that the poet intended that all his love poems be interpreted as allegory.⁴⁹ Ratzaby already noted the weakness of these lines as a "transition verse" and argued that Samuel was not always particular about the transitional lines. But this is a weak explanation; indeed the example Ratzaby uses to support his claim (No. 131, pp. 280–83, in Jarden's edition) is not a *qaṣīda* at all, but a wine poem. If the lines in question are not, as I rather suspect they are, interpolated by the hand of a later editor, then the meaning seems rather to be that *this particular nasīb* is a mere literary device, like the poetry of the Song of Songs. We cannot learn from this that *all* of his poetry is mere allegory.

There remain a few more points of interpretation. Ratzaby takes the blessing in line 1 to mean the "land" (earth) where the boy has gone; since he has left the poet, only in the land to which he has gone is he a blessing. However, this seems rather forced. Nothing in the poem leads us to think the boy has left the poet. On the contrary, his presence is a constant source of anguish to the poet and to all the boy's would-be lovers.

The idea of drinking saliva from the mouth of the beloved is certainly common to love poetry everywhere. It is not necessary to assume that this has been borrowed from Arabic poetry; see, for instance, Song of Songs 4.10–11.

The reference to the boy's "roaming" in line 8, which may have caused Ratzaby to conclude the boy had left for another land, seems rather to refer to his roaming from one lover to another. Not that the boy gives in to any of the advances made to him, of which he seems blissfully unaware (line 5), but that he teases and torments each of his pursuers in succession. Somewhat lighter in tone is the following independent *ṣeṣi* poem:

True, the gazelle who gathers roses in your garden I have loved —
 therefore you turn your anger against me.
 If you would see with your eyes whom I have loved,
 then your beloved would seek you and not find you!
 He who said: "Give me, please, the honey of your words" —
 I answered: "Give me honey from your tongue."
 He became angered and said with wrath: "Shall we sin
 to the living God?" I replied: "On me, sir, be your sin."⁵⁰

The poet has become smitten by a boy, perhaps a slave, who works for a

⁴⁹ Most recently, David Segal, "Ha'arah le-ma'amar 'ha-Ahavah be-shirat R' Shemuel ha-nagid'," *Tarbiz* 41 (1971), 238–40, to which Judah Ratzaby replied, *ibid.* 43 (1973), 185–87.

⁵⁰ *Divan*, p. 297 (No. 162); also in Schirmann, *ha-Shirah*, 1:154 (No. 2).

friend of his. He has thereby incurred the anger of the friend, and Samuel rebukes him by suggesting that if he only realized the beauty of the boy, he would give up the boy he loves and also pursue this one. The boy has asked Samuel either for instruction or to recite his poetry (the term “honey” as a metaphor for learning is common in medieval Hebrew). The insolent reply of the poet is to request permission to kiss the boy. The outraged response when the boy suggests the sin of such an act is typical of medieval Hebrew verse and adds to the delight of the poem as a whole.

The following is equally carefree:

God, change, please, the heart of the dove who stole
 My slumber — and restore to my eyelids a little sleep.
 The beloved who came by Thy oath [with Thy permission] and gave me
 His heart's love, without force, as a gift
 Has been treacherous, and so every boy is treacherous.
 But now, forgive his sin — or if not, punish me!⁵¹

Similar to this is the following:

O moon, created to rule the earth
 by day and night, gently rule over hearts!
 How do you judge the star [the boy], whom I thought of as a brother,
 yet through no fault [of mine] he turned cruel to me?
 Buy me a boy — whom all boys will envy
 for his beauty — for all the wealth I have acquired,
 And I will see if he has eyes like the eyes of the boy who fled
 after he twice came willing and slept with me.⁵²

These two poems are about boys who consented to sleep with the poet (actual sex may not have been involved). However, the main point of most Arabic and Hebrew love poetry is the unhappiness of love. Even here, the point of the first poem is that the boy has now deceived his lover (“and so every boy is treacherous”), with whom he once gladly shared a bed. Paronomasia was a favorite device of this poetry, an example of which is found in line 1 of the first poem, reminiscent of (I do not say “influenced by”) al-Ruṣāfī's poem quoted above (at note 35, in the text); *gozal* (“dove”) and *gazel* (“stole”), calling to mind (connotative meaning) Arabic *ghazāl* (“gazelle”) and *ghazal* (“love poetry”).

Finally, there is a very interesting poem in which Samuel has borrowed an Arabic motif, that of the stuttering boy:

Where is the stuttering boy, where has he gone,
 gazelle perfumed with pure myrrh and frankincense?
 The moon has concealed the light of the stars —
 the graceful beloved conceals the light of the moon!

⁵¹ *Divan*, p. 301 (No. 172).

⁵² *Divan*, p. 303 (No. 176).

He chirped with soft speech and relied upon
 Him who gave voice to the turtle-dove and swallow at their time⁽¹⁾
 He meant to say "bad" and said to me "touch";⁽²⁾
 I touched him as his tongue declared.
 He desired to say "go" and said "belly";⁽³⁾
 I hastened to his belly, fenced with roses.⁽⁴⁾ 53

(1) Cf. Jer. 8.7, "at the time of their coming"; i.e., they know to sing at the proper time.

(2) *Ra'* ("bad"), *ga'* ("touch").

(3) *Surah* ("go"), *sugah* ("belly").

(4) Cf. Song of Songs 7.3; the reference is to the pubic region, surrounded by hair.

The cuteness of the lisping boy, with its endless possibilities for puns, was a common theme in Arabic poetry. Ratzaby cites the verse of Abū Nuwās: "My heart melts because of the boy (*ṣabī*). I loved in him / the forming of the *r* in his mouth when he speaks."⁵⁴ Similar, too, are the fragments mentioned by Ibn Khallikān:

The letter *r* cannot hope for union (with you), nor can I:
 Avoidance includes us both and makes us equal (in misfortune)!
 When I am alone, I write *r* on the palm of my hand,
 I weep lamenting, and so does the letter *r*.⁵⁵

Indeed, according to al-Jāḥiẓ the mispronouncing of *gh* as *r* was a common error that even learned people were likely to make.

Solomon Ibn Gabirol (b. ca. 1021) was Samuel Ibn Nagrillah's contemporary and protégé and may have borrowed some ideas from him, as perhaps in the opening of the following:

He steals⁽¹⁾ the sleep of my eyes and I'm unaware —
 the like has never been seen or heard!
 I draw his heart, slowly, lest he be weary —
 and he draws my heart, slowly, lest I pine away.
 If dawn comes to me—gently,
 take pity on me—perhaps the evil will end.⁽²⁾
 Although I have not embraced you, nevertheless for you is my love —
 strangers devour what I embrace.⁽³⁾
 I was asked to describe his form and said
 "Your soul has torn the spheres of the earth!"⁽⁴⁾
 Come, let us sing to the vine a song
 and in it bow to God and to Him bend down.
 56

⁵³ *Divan*, p. 296 (No. 160); Schirmann 1:156.

⁵⁴ Judah Ratzaby, "ha-Ahavah be-shirat R' Shemuel ha-nagid," *Tarbiz* 39 (1969), 149.

⁵⁵ Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, p. 59.

⁵⁶ Schirmann, *Shirim ḥadashim*, pp. 175–78. The rest of the poem is in praise of wine, to which he turns to help him forget the boy.

- (1) *Yigzol*; see my remarks above on Samuel's poem "God, change, please . . ."
- (2) Plea addressed perhaps to God, perhaps to his friends: if I pass another sleepless night, pity me.
- (3) Possibly, following Schirmann's suggestion: others enjoy your passion (but not me).
- (4) I.e., it is impossible to describe the boy.

Ibn Gabirol was too great a poet to be content with mere repetition of standard clichés in his poetry. Here is a series of short poems in which he describes all the usual beautiful features of a boy, but in each case he adds a freshness and originality to his verse:

I will be a ransom for the gazelle of love,
 in whom all who grieve find happiness;⁽¹⁾
 Whose cheeks are like white marble,
 and ruddy [as though] anointed with the blood of lovers.⁽²⁾
 The fruit of his lips⁽³⁾ are like swords
 and his eyes like arrows to the heart.⁽⁵⁷⁾

- (1) Even those who sorrow rejoice in him.
- (2) For want of a better word; the Hebrew word *ḥosheq* was coined by the medieval poets (from *hesheq*), analogous to Arabic *‘ashiq* (from *‘ashīqa*, *‘ishq*).⁵⁸ Both the Hebrew and the Arabic mean, basically, "to join together"; hence, "passion, lust." The topos of the martyred lover was standard in Arabic poetry.
- (3) Speech (Isa. 57.19), not "teeth" as Jarden thought; his soft speech "slays" lovers, as do his glances.

The poem turns the conventional description of the boy's beauty into something much more poignant. His cheeks are ruddy, but from the blood of his would-be lovers. The "fruit of his lips" is not the usual sweet saliva, but his words, which are like swords in rejecting those who court him. That the glances of the beloved are like arrows was a standard conceit, but here the arrows take on a more sinister meaning, for they pierce the heart of those who adore him.

Say to him whose hair embraces his cheek:⁽¹⁾
 How can noon embrace the morning!⁽²⁾
 Do not consider it a sin to Agur⁽³⁾ in saying
 That beauty is vanity and grace a lie.
 It is sufficient that your cheeks testify the truth,
 For the deeds of God are unfathomable.⁽⁵⁹⁾

⁵⁷ *Shirei ha-ḥol le-rabbi Shlomoh Ibn Gabirol*, ed. Dov Jarden (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 370 (No. 317); *Shlomoh Ibn Gabirol, shirei ha-ḥol*, ed. Hayyim Schirmann and H. Brody (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 32 (No. 57).

⁵⁸ See on the interchangeable Arabic and Hebrew terms the important article of Alfred Guillaume, "Hebrew and Arabic Lexicography," *Abr-Nahrain* 1 (1959–60), 1–35; 2 (1960–61), 5–35; 3 (1961–62), 1–10; 4 (1962–63), 1–18. This significant study deserves to be issued as a monograph.

⁵⁹ Ed. Jarden, p. 371 (No. 218); ed. Schirmann-Brody, p. 112 (No. 186).

- (1) Dark hairs have begun to appear on his cheeks.
- (2) A contradiction; i.e., how can he be both a youth and an adult?
- (3) Solomon (Prov. 30.1), a hint also to the poet's name.

The theme of the adolescent whose approaching adulthood, signalled by the appearance of down on the cheek, brought an end to his desirability as an object of love was common in Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew poetry.⁶⁰ In Arabic, these poems are called *mu'adhdhār* poems (from *'idhār*, "down"). In Spanish, the youth who first began to show signs of a beard was called *mancebo*, and such poems are referred to also as *barbiponiente*. These poems are particularly common in the Arabic poetry of al-Andalus, as the following examples will show:

"He himself recited to me in Seville concerning a youth, of white face, on which down appeared:

Oh, you of white cheeks! They were filled with light
until the down came to darken your beauty.
You have remained like the candle in which,
on extinguishing the flame, the wick is blackened."⁶¹

"With the nascent down the beauty of this boy
was thinned, and our hearts also were made thin,
of love of him. It is not that the blackness has
covered his cheek, but that it has
thereby discolored his black eyes!"⁶²

"You were the full moon, until one night
you were infected by decay.
When the down sprouted, I said:
"Love is finished. The black raven of down
has announced separation!"⁶³

Spain was almost unique among the European countries of the Middle Ages for the heterogeneity of its population and the cosmopolitan atmosphere of its larger centers of culture. Indeed, these characteristics actually predate the Muslim conquest of Spain in 711 and go back to the time of the Roman occupation and Phoenician settlement. Romance, called "Ladino" or "Latino" in Arabic and then in Hebrew, developed earlier in Spain than in

⁶⁰ See, e.g., K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality*, p. 215; Boswell, *Christianity*, p. 29 n. 55. The *Greek Anthology* is filled with examples of this motif. Among Hebrew poets, Judah ha-Levi particularly wrote many poems on this theme.

⁶¹ Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī, *Libro de las banderas*, p. 150, citing the poet Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm Ibn Sahl al-Isrā'īlī of Seville (a converted Jew; d. 1260).

⁶² Ibid., p. 170 (Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Ibn Sāra; 12th century).

⁶³ Ibid., p. 245 (Abū-l-Ḥasan Ya'far ibn al-Ḥāyy (Lorca, 12th century). There are, of course, numerous earlier examples as well: e.g., *The Diwan of Abū Nuwās*, trans. Arthur Wormhoudt, pp. 105 (No. 253), 109 (267), 125 (515), etc.

other countries.⁶⁴ Undoubtedly, according to the currently popular theory, oral poetry and songs in Romance existed from an early period. Among the Muslims of Spain there emerged, subsequently, a form of poetry known as the *muwashshahah* which had a final rhymed couplet in Romance written in Arabic characters. The Hebrew poets, too, wrote this kind of verse, except that the final couplet might be either in Spanish or in Arabic. The important thing was that the final couplet was taken, apparently, from popular sayings or perhaps even from verses that were common among the ordinary people. The poem builds up to a climax which seems to find its natural conclusion in the vulgar final couplet.⁶⁵ Many of these Hebrew poems are of the *ševi* genre, as the following by Ibn Gabirol:

He wounds me, whose necklace is the Pleiades⁽¹⁾
 and whose neck is [white] like the light of the moon.
 In opening the loops of his mouth⁽²⁾ he reveals
 the light of his pearls⁽³⁾ like the sun from its abode.
 I answered him: "Take my soul and slay [it];
 or if not, heal me, please heal!"
 He replied with the sweetness of his mouth:
 "There is no cure for an old wound."
 "Is my wound old, my friend?
 It is fresh — not more than a year old."
 He answered: "Drink my cup, and sing to me
 as on a day of parting, let there be no exaltation."
 And my beloved sang to me in Arabic:
 "In memory of the man whose appearance I love."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Romance is also often referred to in Arabic sources as "*al-jāmi'a*." The original, and correct, form is "*al-latīnī al-jāmi'a*" (the last word simply means "the community"), and *Latino* or *Latīnī* (the former a Romance form in Arabic characters) always meant "Romance" in al-Andalus (see, e.g., Ibn al-Baitar, as cited in J. Simonet, *Glosario*, p. 26; *Primera crónica general* 1.632, col. b; Ibn al-Qutīyah, in J. Ribera, *Discursos leídos ante la Real Academia de la Historia* [Madrid, 1915], p. 109 and p. 19 n. 1). For Jewish sources for "*latino*" as Romance, see Moses Ibn Ezra, *Kitāb al-muḥādara w'al-mudhākara*, ed. and trans. A. S. Halkin (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 42. (I am preparing an English translation of this work.) That Romance appeared in Spain prior to other countries is not subject to doubt. The *muwashshahāt* are themselves the first written evidence of this, and, in addition, certain Castilian dialects were already in use locally as early as the early ninth century (see Stanley Payne, *A History of Spain and Portugal* [Madison, Wisconsin, 1973] 1:39), and in court documents already by the eleventh century (*ibid.*, p. 79). The earliest manuscript of vernacular poetry of France dates from 1088. German, of course, is earlier. (See generally Robert K. Spaulding, *How Spanish Grew* [Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1962].)

⁶⁵ In addition to Stern's previously cited book (above, n. 46), see James Monroe, "Hispano-Arabic Poetry During the Caliphate of Cordoba," in G. E. von Grunebaum, *Arabic Poetry, Theory and Development*, pp. 125–54, and *idem*, "Formulaic Diction and the Common Origins of Romance Lyric Traditions," *Hispanic Review* 43 (1975), 341–50, two of the most exciting articles on the subject. The literature on this topic is vast, but these articles and Stern's book (actually a collection of earlier articles and papers) provide a good introduction.

⁶⁶ Ed. Jarden, p. 361 (No. 205); Schirmann-Brody, p. 62 (No. 110); unfortunately, Stern seems not to have known of this poem.

- (1) The constellation (frequently used in Arabic and Hebrew poetry); the meaning here is that his neck is so lovely only the stars can be its ornament.
- (2) *Edyo* (from *'adiy*, *'adah*). For the meaning "mouth," see Ibn Janah, *Sefer ha-shorashim*, s.v. *'edah*. The old English translations of Ps. 32.9 in fact read "his mouth," and so should Ps. 103.5. However, *'adiy* can also mean "ornament," its primary meaning.
- (3) His teeth.

The dialogue form is very common in Hebrew poetry, though not at all in Arabic. It is very unusual, however, if not unique, to have the language of the final couplet indicated ("in Arabic"). This may show that the poem is an early example of its genre in Hebrew. It need hardly be mentioned, of course, that the fact that the boy sang the line in Arabic does not necessarily mean he was a Muslim, although he may have been.

One of the finest of Ibn Gabirol's poems is the following:

Branch⁽¹⁾ who has exalted⁽²⁾ my heart with its blossoms,
 and bough of myrtle which passion⁽³⁾ has planted in its thoughts,
 Standing as a pillar of ivory, lovely in the eyes of every
 lover, and like a lover very poor are his gifts.⁽⁴⁾
 The secret of love he understands from the hearts: when
 you raise your heart to him, he will raise his eyes to you.⁽⁵⁾
 Lovers have wept for me, but have not [truly] wept;
 for like the cooing⁽⁶⁾ of a dove I will moan before his eyes.⁽⁷⁾
 His cheeks are like apples of gold in a setting
 of silver, and a word fitly spoken.⁽⁸⁾
 The moon is shamed when it sees the light
 of his cheeks, and the sun sets in his face.⁽⁹⁾
 His breast is like golden pomegranates fastened with silver;
 would that I could suck his pomegranates!⁶⁷

- (1) *Amir* ("upper branch," sometimes "treetop"), also an Arabic name and so could hint at the name of the boy. Boys were often referred to as "branch" in Arabic poetry because of their grace and leanness.
- (2) *He'emir*, according to Ibn Janah, *Shorashim* (s.v. *amr*) means "exaltation, lifting up." Indeed, he says "therefore the upper branch is called *amir*," which exactly shows the intent of the poet; note the paronomasia here. In Arabic *amara* has as a meaning "command, exercise power over," while *amir*, of course, means "ruler, military commander." Thus, on a secondary level of meaning, the boy has ruled over the poet's heart.
- (3) As earlier noted, *hesheq*, under influence of Arabic *'ishq*, has a stronger meaning than biblical "desire, love."
- (4) There is the possibility of a double meaning in the second hemistich: *dallu* can mean "poor" (from *dal*) and *matenaw* "his gifts," in which case the meaning is that he is very sparing in giving satisfaction to his lovers. However, *dallu* proper means "wave, swing" (from *dalal*) and *matenaw* can as easily be a form of *matenayim*, "loins, waist" (e.g., 1 Kings 2.5). The meaning then would be: "and like a lover (passionate one) his loins (or waist) swing(s)." The thin-waisted boy, compared to a myrtle branch undulating in the wind, is common in Arabic.

⁶⁷ Ed. Jarden, p. 362 (No. 206); Schirrmann-Brody, p. 72 (No. 123).

- (5) When you raise your heart, hoping to have him, he will "raise his eyes" haughtily. The first hemistich is somewhat obscure, and I am uncertain as to the translation.
- (6) Actually, "moaning" (a dirge); cf. Ezek. 7.16.
- (7) *Yonah* as "eyes": Song of Songs 4.1; because of his beauty.
- (8) Prov. 25.11. This quotation of a full verse from the Bible is unusual and not very effective poetically.
- (9) This line appears only in Schirmann's edition. It may be a substitute for the above line because of the problem I noted.

Before leaving Ibn Gabirol (who wrote many more love poems about boys), I should mention in passing an article by Aaron Citron, who notes that "the question that immediately arises," if we are to assume that all such poems are really about women, "is why a greater vice would be depicted to mask a lesser one."⁶⁸ In other words, why would the poets have selected boys, supposedly a completely illicit object of sexual desire, as a device to conceal their less objectionable love for women? The point is, of course, well taken, but Citron goes astray when he claims to have invalidated Schirmann's conclusions by discovering a certain "innocence" or "sanctity" in a poem that he describes as Ibn Gabirol's "lament on the death of a young boy," his lover.⁶⁹ In fact, the poem is a lament on the death not of his lover but of his own son! In any case, a significant number of Ibn Gabirol's love poems deal quite obviously with boys.

Moses Ibn Ezra (1055–ca. 1135/40) is often considered the greatest of the Hebrew poets of Spain. Certainly his poetry is characterized by a complexity that is at once its greatness and the quality that makes it at times maddeningly difficult to comprehend. Practically all of the genres and most of the motifs of medieval Hebrew poetry are represented in his work, and it is impossible any longer to label him with such simplistic titles as "the penitent" (*ha-salḥan*), as was often done in the Jewish community because of his liturgical poetry. The dangers involved in failing to recognize the motifs of medieval Hebrew poetry, prominent among them the love of boys, can be seen in the theory of the nineteenth-century scholar Gustav Karpeles, who believed that Ibn Ezra fell in love with his own niece and for this reason was exiled from his home in Granada. This view was based solely upon his German translation of the following poem, in which he deliberately changed the subject from masculine to feminine!⁷⁰ The late David Yellin's belief that Ibn Ezra wrote love poems only to boys and never about women⁷¹ aroused the indignation of Dan Pagis, who points out that Ibn Ezra was married and

⁶⁸ "Aspects of Love in the Hebrew Poetry of Moslem Spain," *Literature East & West* 11 (1967), 119–25 (generally of little value). Similarly, Dan Pagis, *Shirat ha-ḥol ve-torat ha-shir le-Mosheh Ibn 'Ezra u-vene'i doro* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 271 n. 42, asks the same question about poetry concerning boys. (Yet, as we shall see, Pagis was not consistent in his views.)

⁶⁹ Translated by Citron, pp. 123–24.

⁷⁰ *Geschichte der jüdischen Literatur* (Berlin, 1886) 1:504–5.

⁷¹ Yellin, *Ketavim nivḥarim* (Jerusalem, 1939) 2:341.

a father, as though this automatically precludes his being able also to love boys.⁷² Ibn Ezra did, in fact, also write poems about women, but some of his finest poems were about boys, as the following:

To every man our wondrous love⁽¹⁾
 shall be an example in the world to all.⁽²⁾
 I strengthen myself against my oppression⁽³⁾ and you
 are more perverse than all gazelles.⁽⁴⁾
 I shall hide from men what is in my heart
 lest they say it is a disease of folly.
 Know that the sickness of love⁽⁵⁾ is in my heart
 and you increase the illness in keeping away;
 And that the world is like a firm seal⁽⁶⁾ because of your wandering
 and its breadth, without you, like a prison;
 And that men, were they most noble,⁽⁷⁾
 without sight of you⁽⁸⁾ I consider wild animals.
 In your mouth are streams of flowing honey⁽⁹⁾
 and I faint in my pain among the thirsty;
 Your scent is myrrh in the nostrils of strangers and I pant
 like the jackals in the dry wind of the desert.⁽¹⁰⁾
 To you — youth who understands hidden things,⁽¹¹⁾
 and a fawn, but who hunts, gently, lions;⁽¹²⁾
 Who gives life to all lovers and my life⁽¹³⁾
 without fault makes hang before me⁽¹⁴⁾ —
 To you, greeting: Know that my love
 greatly increases⁽¹⁵⁾ while you increase sin,
 And that your dwelling is in my eye and heart;
 although men who dwell in them fear
 Since in this⁽¹⁶⁾ a flame burns
 and from that⁽¹⁷⁾ clouds draw⁽¹⁸⁾ water.
 And that your wrath is [as] the favor of God in my eyes,
 and though my illness is strong I do not envy the healthy.
 I will not turn from my path until the ground
 pours out dew and the heavens bring forth vegetation.
 Revive [me], my fawn, as is the desire of my heart,
 while the swallow yet twitters among the branches.⁷³

(1) *Ahab* as a noun meaning “love” was coined by Ibn Nagrillah.

(2) To future lovers, who will talk of our love.

(3) Cf. Amos 5.9, and also Jer. 8.18: “I strengthen myself against sorrow.”

⁷² “Nosē, nissuah ve-tabnit: sugei shirat ha-hol bi-Sefarad,” *ha-Sifrut* 1 (1968–69), 43–62.

⁷³ Moses Ibn Ezra, *Shirei ha-hol*, ed. H. Brody (Berlin, 1935), pp. 15–16 (No. 11). Note the dramatic contrast between the “know” of line 4, introducing a series of almost breathless statements (which is why I have retained the otherwise awkward “Ands” in the translation) in which the poet seeks to inform the boy of his suffering, and the “know” of line 11, which introduces a series informing the boy that his love for him increases in proportion to the increase in suffering. The first part is all reproof, while the last exhibits the lover’s desperate passion. (Again, note the similarities in some respects to the poems in Boswell, *Christianity*, p. 370 ff.)

- (4) With only a slight change of vowel points we get the word *'ul* ("suckling, youngster"). Could the poet have intended the pun?
- (5) See note (1) above.
- (6) Cf. Job 41.7 and 8.
- (7) Brody suggested correcting here: *ke-'ayyalim* ("gazelles"), and in the manuscript the Arabic word *al-ṣabī* does appear in the margin. However, aside from the fact that no such masculine plural form exists, the word *'ayil* (pl. *'elim*) as written, literally "rams," means "mighty ones" (e.g., Ex. 15.15), and in Semitic languages nobles were often referred to with various names of animals: lions, gazelles, etc. It was sometimes used in this sense in medieval Hebrew; see, e.g., Hayyim Gallipapa at the beginning of Isaac b. Sheshet's responsum No. 394.
- (8) The word is undoubtedly meant to be *marah* ("vision, sight of someone").
- (9) Cf. Ps. 19.11.
- (10) Cf. Jer. 4.11.
- (11) Paronomasia: *'elem* ("youth"), *ta'alumim* ("hidden things").
- (12) I.e., his lovers, whom he "hunts" (entices) in a guileless way.
- (13) Paronomasia: *ḥayyē* ("gives life, revives"), *ḥayyai* ("my life").
- (14) Cf. Deut. 28.66.
- (15) Alternatively, "you increase" (the form is the same).
- (16) The heart.
- (17) The eye.
- (18) Cf. Jer. 10.13.

I have noted that Muslim poets, both in al-Andalus and elsewhere, sometimes wrote love poetry the subject of which was a Christian or a Jewish boy. Jewish poets, too, wrote poems about Muslim boys and women. The following brief poem on this theme is from Ibn Ezra's *'Anaq*:⁷⁴

My heart mourns⁽¹⁾ because of a son of Qedar,
A fawn lovely of appearance, young of years.
His cheeks are like scarlet and black⁽²⁾ his hair,
And his lips are like crimson.

- (1) Paronomasia: *ḥiqdir* ("to darken, mourn"), *Qedar* (an Arab; cf. Isa. 21.17). An alternative reading of the line could be: "A son of Qedar darkened my heart."
- (2) *Tekhelet*; often thought of as "blue," but the word was interpreted as referring to a black color by many commentators.

Many poems (Arabic and Hebrew) celebrate the beauty of the boy cup-bearer (Arabic *sāqī*), whose duty it was to fill the cups of wine in the tavern or at an all-night drinking party. Sometimes these boys were also the object of passion:

By my soul!⁽¹⁾ The night of companionship there rose in him,
in spite of fate, the sun of my joy.
In the night the word of my fawn was my choice fruit⁽²⁾
and his mouth was my cup and the wine of his saliva my juice;⁽³⁾

⁷⁴ Brody, p. 351, No. 49. (The *'Anaq*, meaning "necklace," is a collection of short poetic epigrams.)

And the beauty of his face my lilies, and the rows
on his cheeks were considered as branches of my myrtle.⁽⁴⁾
When his eyes pierced⁽⁵⁾ my heart,
quickly to the balm of his breast [I took] flight.⁷⁵

- (1) I will ransom the night with my soul when . . . (an Arabic expression).
- (2) Song of Songs 7.14 (referring here to the fruit that was tasted to enhance the drinking of the wine).
- (3) Song of Songs 8.2.
- (4) Rows, probably of fine down on the cheek, which is often compared to myrtle leaves in Arabic poetry (the myrtle, or another spice, was inhaled with the wine). Not all references in Arabic or Hebrew poetry to down on the boy's face are negative.
- (5) Brody's reading is incorrect here, and it must be *yiskhu* (from *sokhah*, "to pierce, to see").

The following poem combines the greatest imaginable pleasures — a cup of wine and a boy:

Desire⁽¹⁾ of my heart and delight of my eyes —
A fawn⁽²⁾ beside me and a cup in my hand!
Many admonish me, but I do not heed;
Come, O gazelle, and I will subdue them.
Time will destroy them and death shepherd⁽³⁾ them.
Come, O gazelle, rise and feed me⁽⁴⁾
With the honey of your lips, and satisfy me.
Why do they hold back my heart, why?
If because of sin and guilt,
I will be ravished by your beauty — God is there!⁽⁵⁾
Pay no attention to the words of my oppressor,
A perverse man — come and try me!
He was enticed, and we went up to his mother's house,
And he gave his shoulder to my burden.⁽⁶⁾
Night and day I was only with him.
I undressed him, and he undressed me;
I sucked his lips and he sucked mine.⁽⁷⁾
When I left my heart as a pledge in his eyes,
The burden of my guilt was also weighed in his hand.
He sought enmity,⁽⁸⁾ and inflicted his anger,⁽⁹⁾
And angrily cried, "Enough; leave me!
Do not force me, and do not entice me."
Do not be angry with me, gazelle, to destruction —
Extraordinary is your will, my dear, extraordinary!
Kiss your beloved and fulfill his desire.
If it is in your soul to give life, revive me —
Or if your desire is to kill, kill me!⁷⁶

(1) The word also means "lust."

(2) Boy ('*ofer*).

⁷⁵ Brody, pp. 158–59 (No. 159).

⁷⁶ Brody, pp. 161–62 (No. 149); Schirmann, *ha-Shurah*, 1:367.

- (3) "Gather" them to it.
- (4) *Havrieni*; "feed me, fatten me."
- (5) *Eshgeh*; "I will be ravished." The word also has the meaning "to err, unintentionally to sin." "God is there" is ambiguous — either "there" (to forgive), or "there" (in the boy's beauty).
- (6) Cf. Gen. 49.15 (the context there implies that, possibly, the boy was paid; at least he consented willingly).
- (7) Literally, "he sucked me" (*yanaq*, which only means "suck"); however, I have no reason to believe that it means anything other than kissing.
- (8) Cf. Job 33.10.
- (9) Job 35.15 (*paqad* there means "inflict; visit upon").

The following short poem concludes the selection from Ibn Ezra:

A bunch from the offspring of rows⁽¹⁾
 in the hand of a fawn, and pleasant plants.⁽²⁾
 I thought him, when he was near my side,
 like the moon at the edge of a rainbow.^{(3) 77}

- (1) A bunch of flowers from the rows of the garden; *aguddah*, "bunch," can also mean "band" (of men).
- (2) Cf. Isa. 17.10, and see verse 11 there (does the poet, therefore, refer to the fleeting youth and beauty of the boy?).
- (3) *Qeshet 'ananim*; cf. Ezek. 1.28, which is a vision of God!

Judah ha-Levi (1075–1141), like Ibn Ezra, is perhaps more generally known for his religious than for his secular poetry; yet both poets in fact wrote more secular verse. Many of ha-Levi's poems are of the *ševi* genre; not all of these are to be found in the section devoted to love poetry in Brody's edition of his *Divan*, but are scattered throughout. The following is a *muwashshah*, a favorite form used by ha-Levi for love poems:

Inquire of my fawn⁽¹⁾ my well-being, / he will say what profit there is in
 my blood:⁽²⁾
 Speak to him flattery,
 That he despise the gain of oppression.⁽³⁾
 His — to my weakened eyes⁽⁴⁾ —
 His to restore a bit my well-being / perhaps my dream will behold him:⁽⁵⁾
 The gazelle whom I ransom with my soul;
 Let the death of man seize upon me,⁽⁶⁾
 He is the keeper of my paradise and my fire.
 From his cheeks is the garden of my spices / as from his eyes my poison:⁽⁷⁾
 So with the arrows of his eyes he oppresses;
 The heart of his fellow he smites once and again.
 [But] those who rejoice at calamity⁽⁸⁾ I answer:
 Even if my companion is changed into my enemy⁽⁹⁾ / the yoke of his love
 is dominion to my shoulder:⁽¹⁰⁾

⁷⁷ Brody, p. 152 (No. 150).

With all the delights of the world I will ransom
 The night when my lust was fulfilled⁽¹⁾
 By the gazelle of loveliness, and I scraped
 From his lips the flowing wine of his vineyard / and I kissed his ruddy
 cheeks:⁽¹²⁾

Of the bdellium⁽¹³⁾ of his mouth he gave me drink
 Blood of grapes in crimson lips —
 Until he awoke and answered me:
 “How long, how long / will I give you to drink wine from my mouth?”⁷⁸

- (1) *Ofer* (Song of Songs 2.9 and 4.5)
- (2) Ps. 30.10; here the meaning is: he will tell what advantage there is to my life when I am dying of love of him.
- (3) Isa. 33.15.
- (4) Ps. 6.8; weakened by sorrow.
- (5) Perhaps he will restore (or: he is obligated to restore) a bit of sleep to me and I will see him in a dream.⁷⁹
- (6) Ps. 55.16 (the *qeri*: *yashi' mavet*).
- (7) I delight in the loveliness of his face (cf. Song of Songs 5.13), yet his glances have the power to slay me.
- (8) Prov. 17.5.
- (9) *Qami*, apparently coined from *qum*, in the sense of “rise up against me.”
- (10) Cf. Isa. 9.5.
- (11) Literally, “he pressed my breast.” Derived from Ezek. 23.2 and 8, but the general context there of sexual passion is intended. As to Brody's confusion over the meaning of *bo*, I fail to see the difficulty. Obviously it is a pronoun, the antecedent of which is *leil* in line 15: “the night in which. . . .”
- (12) The apparent first person suffixes are necessitated by meter.
- (13) Often translated as “pearl” and used poetically to mean “teeth,” but it really is a fragrant gum, like myrrh (cf. Num. 11.7).

There are many other *sevi* poems by ha-Levi, but two more examples must suffice:

Cheeks like coals of fire on a pavement of marble,⁽¹⁾
 Embroidered round about in myrrh like embroidered linen.⁽²⁾
 He increases⁽³⁾ fire in my heart in approaching me,
 For he pities once and is treacherous six times!^{(4) 80}

- (1) The poem is based throughout on various plays on words; here, *rispah* meaning both “coal” (Isa. 6.6) and “pavement” (Esther 1.6). The meaning, of course, is ruddy cheeks on pale skin.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Judah ha-Levi, *Divan*, ed. H. Brody (Berlin, 1894–1930) 2:14 (No. 11).

⁷⁹ The theme of the image of the beloved appearing in a dream is a major topos of the love poetry. I have dealt with this in my article “Satire and Debate in Two Famous Medieval Poems from al-Andalus: Love of Boys vs. Girls, the Pen and Other Themes,” *The Maghreb Review* 4 (1979), 105–13, which contains a translation of the famous poem of Yūsuf Ibn Ḥasday and the reply by Ibn Nagrillah.

⁸⁰ *Divan* 2:31 (No. 28).

⁸¹ This line, I should point out, also contains an allusion to Song of Songs 8.6: *reshafeyah*

- (2) His cheeks are “decorated” with fine down, like myrrh (not yet dark enough to constitute the beginnings of the dreaded beard).
- (3) *Yosef*. Possibly the emphatic placing of this verb form, the same as the name “Joseph,” at the beginning of the line is a hint to the name of the boy.
- (4) For every one time he lets me have my way with him, six times he refuses. Again, the theme of the deceitful boy.

In addition to borrowing themes and language from Arabic poetry, some poets also translated or adapted Arabic poetry into Hebrew. An example by ha-Levi:

The day when I fondled him on my knee
And he saw his image in the pupils of my eyes,
He kissed my eyes — little deceiver,
His reflection he kissed, and not my eyes!⁸²

This is a reworking of a rather weak poem by the famous al-Mutanabbi:

A beauty who as long as I was alone with her
saw her visage in my vision.
She kissed my eyes and she cheated me,
for she kissed her own mouth in that.⁸³

Besides the obvious general improvement of the poem in ha-Levi's transformation of it, he has made it much more believable and delightful by changing the subject from a woman to a young boy, of whom we can more easily imagine such behavior.

We have as yet relatively little poetry from Abraham Ibn Ezra (1092–1167), who must have been one of the greatest and most prolific of the medieval poets; even so we have some outstanding examples of the *ševi* genre from his hand. The following is on the theme of the “spy,” who objected on moral grounds to love affairs with boys:

Spy of the lovely gazelle, heal me:
[let me] see the glowing cheeks!
[But] he was angered and his eyes kept watch
like a serpent by the road.⁽¹⁾

rishpei esh, “its [love's] coals are coals of fire”; *rešef* and *reshef* are the same word. I am very grateful to Prof. Boswell for his very insightful note here, which I reproduce in full with his kind permission: “The word *shesh* can mean “marble” (as here), “fine linen,” as in line 2, or “six,” as in line 4. The entire poem is constructed on puns and the repetition of the same sounds with different meanings [note: this is what we call paronomasia]. It is impossible to convey in translation the effect of reading the same word each time, but being forced by the context to understand it differently. As but one of many layers of richness achieved by this technique one might note that the repetition of the same word (*shesh*) in reference to the boy three times with three entirely different meanings evokes an image of the boy himself as containing many different qualities, or perhaps being of a highly changeable nature.”

⁸² Schirmann, *ha-Shirah* 1:446 (No. 2); cf. Jer. 31.19 and Isa. 66.12.

⁸³ al-Mutanabbi, *Diwan*, trans. Wormhoudt, p. 322.

Beloved, I desire that you turn to me,
 my weeping and misery do not forsake.
 My heart comforts me: perhaps
 his hard heart will soften.
 [Perhaps] he will not be angry at the words of my speech;
 but, because of his guardian,⁽²⁾ he is silent.
 To him my words are strange,
 for he has become lame with the affliction of his age.⁽³⁾
 Winking to me by design,
 he acts humbly⁽⁴⁾ and "tears down the house of the proud."⁽⁵⁾
 Consent, beloved, to meet in secret
 for I shall love to lie with you —
 And to the name of the prince of all Israel⁽⁶⁾
 we will drink and take a cup of wine.
 I will ask that God show
 favor to the seller of wine.⁽⁷⁾
 Joy to my right and my left —
 a fawn⁽⁸⁾ and spiced wine.
 Wealth or health⁽⁹⁾ for drinking
 I will give, and it will take all!⁽¹⁰⁾ ⁸⁴

(1) Gen. 49.17.

(2) The "spy"; no legal relationship is implied (a common theme in Arabic).

(3) See Ex. 12.27 and 2 Sam. 4.4.

(4) Deceitfully, pretending to be circumspect.

(5) Thus, he dashes the hopes of his lover (Prov. 15.25).

(6) The Jewish notable in whose honor the ode was written.

(7) Literally, "golden water," white wine, considered superior to red.

(8) The boy.

(9) Both words unclear in the manuscript; perhaps *hon* ("wealth") and *basari* ("my flesh").

(10) This is the "transition verse"; remainder of the poem is praise of the "master" of the boy (was he a Muslim slave?).

Abraham Ibn Ezra's son Isaac (twelfth century), who later converted to Islam and then returned to Judaism, also wrote several *ṣevi* poems, of which the following *muwashshaḥ* is perhaps one of the best:

The secret of love, how can it be contained?
 The heart and the tear are talebearers.⁽¹⁾
 The heart is restrained from what it seeks,
 Shut up and by passion of him besieged,
 Unable to obtain its desire.
 If it presumes to attain to the stars,
 Its pride is brought down, laid low.⁽²⁾
 Beloved like a hart,⁽³⁾ with heart of a panther,⁽⁴⁾
 If you desire to slay,
 My heart is in your hand as clay.

⁸⁴ Schirmann, *Shirim ḥadashim*, pp. 272–74.

But do not summon wanderings upon it,⁽⁵⁾
 For in its midst your name is sheltered.
 Beloved, like a scarlet cord his lips,
 Burning like fire for they are his censer,⁽⁶⁾
 And in them is the work of his signs.⁽⁷⁾
 Live by them, for it waits⁽⁸⁾ for them —
 A heart long suffering because of them.
 How my fate has hardened its⁽⁹⁾ spirit.
 A while, and separation will cause it to be odious
 To my friends who knew its thoughts.
 If wandering has separated us,
 It has increased love.
 I will watch for the gazelle
 To leave in the garden my pleasures,
 Although my rebuker stands to accuse me.⁸⁵

(1) They reveal the secret of his love, cf. Prov. 11.13.

(2) Cf. Isa. 25.12.

(3) *Ofer* (fawn; the boy).

(4) Although lovely of form, his heart is hard.

(5) Based on the Arabic theme of the wandering lover: if you command my heart to "wander" (to stop loving you), know that thoughts of you have already "made a tent" in it and cannot be erased.

(6) Cf. Lev. 16.12.

(7) Cf. Deut. 11.3; the poet means his lips are a "miracle" of beauty.

(8) Or "withers in pain"; cf. Ps. 55.5. He can only live by the beauty of the boy, even though it has long caused suffering.

(9) The subject is still the heart of the poet.

It is perhaps fitting to close with this poem, in my opinion one of the finest of medieval Hebrew poetry. Since this article is limited to a discussion of the poets of the "classical" period of Muslim Spain, the *ševi* poetry of later poets, such as Judah al-Ḥarizi and especially Todros Abulafia, has not been included. The discussion of the poetry of the latter would require another article at least of the same length. The purpose of this article has been to show that there exists a significant and important body of poems of the *ševi* genre in medieval Hebrew poetry, of which only a small sample has here been translated and analyzed for the first time, and that these poems are hardly "allegory" or mere literary devices.

Research on medieval Hebrew secular poetry and literature is still so much in a stage of infancy that it is difficult to make comparisons with other poetry and even to draw solid conclusions about such things as Arabic influence. Certainly the Bible was a major source for the terminology and even the themes of medieval Hebrew poetry, and in the understandable desire to discover Arabic parallels to the poetry this obvious fact is often neglected.

⁸⁵ Isaac Ibn Ezra, *Shirim*, ed. N. Ben-Menahem (Jerusalem, 1950), pp. 21–22 (No. 8).

There is yet no satisfactory study of the use and interpretation of the Bible by the Hebrew poets.

No particular civilization has had a monopoly on themes and idioms of poetic expression. It is perhaps most of interest, therefore, simply to note the similarities of this poetry to ancient Greek and medieval Muslim and Christian poetry dealing with the love of boys. Only a complete analysis of medieval Hebrew poetry, which has not yet been attempted, can reveal the full significance of this genre, but there can be no doubt that it was of major importance (note, for example, my statistical observations with regard to the love poetry of Ibn Nagrillah). This may partially explain the relative obscurity into which medieval Hebrew secular poetry fell after the Middle Ages until its rediscovery in the last century. Such poetry was not in the spirit of the almost exclusively religious culture which emerged among European Jews outside of the Iberian peninsula, and by the same token it continues to arouse the indignant denials of religiously oriented scholars today. However, the full measure of a civilization can only be taken from a comprehensive study of its culture, including the secular as well as the religious aspects. For the historian, therefore, this poetry is a significant source for understanding the culture and daily lives of the Jews of medieval Spain. For the student of literature, I hope that it will open a small window onto the panorama of a nearly forgotten and unknown world of medieval Hebrew literature.

One final word needs to be said about the significance of this poetry in its own age. In our time it is often popularly assumed that the poet is somehow sheltered from the world and lives in a kind of aesthetic paradise of his or her own. The medieval Jewish poet of Spain, however, was totally involved in the life and problems of the community. Some, like Ibn Nagrillah, were statesmen; others, like Judah ha-Levi, doctors; still others, like Ibn Gabirol, philosophers. All led active lives and were widely known throughout the Jewish communities of Spain. This must make us cautious about any assumption that their poetry reached only a relatively small aristocratic class. There were, in fact, many manuscripts of the complete works and of individual poems of these authors, whose wide popularity is further attested by the frequency with which later Jewish authors of Spain cited them. Thus we may with real confidence conclude that this poetry does provide us "a mirror held up to nature," one that reflects the emotions and the lives of the "Golden Age" of Spanish Jewry.

On Tongues Being Bound and Let Loose: Women in Medieval Hebrew Literature

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TOVA ROSEN

On Tongues Being Bound and Let Loose: Women in Medieval Hebrew Literature

All hearts admire you—
yours is hard as stone
All mouths praise only you—
But you respond with silence.¹

Her tongue makes my hair bristle on my head—
her voice loosens the bonds of my heart.
She closes gates of peace and friendship—
and opens doors of quarrel and strife.
On top of Mount Complaint she builds her house—
there her tent is spread and stretched tight.²

THE FIRST EPIGRAPH, from a typical love poem by Shmuel Hanagid, addresses an ideal beloved whose aloof silence tortures her lovers' hearts and in turn loosens the poets' tongues in endless praise. The second passage, characteristic of satirical and moralistic literature, comes from a *maqama* by Ibn Zabara and describes the nagging women whose nagging speech deprives men of their peace of mind. These two types of women—the mute beauty and the garrulous shrew—represent prevailing views in medieval discourse about women.

That these two images are not contrasting but rather complementary is quite obvious: the first, apparently positive view idealizes feminine virtuous silence (even though it torments men's hearts): the second, explicitly negative view, sees woman's speech as her abominable vice descending from Original Sin itself. Either way, men

conceive of themselves in this literature as victims of women who are either too silent or else too talkative. Women's silence and speech are perceived as provocative weapons in the power relationship between the sexes. As George Steiner reminds us: "In every known culture, men have accused women as being garrulous" and lauded "the woman or maiden who says very little, in whom silence is a symbolic counterpart to chasteness and sacrificial grace."³

In the present article I will argue that this speech/silence opposition is far more than just a recurrent literary motif; it is rather a deep structure of significance which operates on several different levels:

(a) At the level of the production and consumption of texts (i.e. the macrosocio-semiotic level), this structure accounts for the absence of (Hebrew) women's literature, and for the fact that male "high" literature had occupied and dominated the entire semiotic-literary scene.

(b) At the wider socio-historical level, this structure reflects, advocates and propagates contemporary patterns of thought and social conditions.

(c) At the micro-semiotic level, this structure determines and underlies the discourse patterns of literary genres (and of individual texts) in which women appear mostly as objects, frequently as addressees and accidentally as speakers.

If a society—and its different classes—"speak" (so to speak) through the literature(s) they produce, then the absence of Jewish (Hebrew) women's literature, speaks for itself. In this literature it is only men who voiced their opinions through the texts they produced and consumed. A marvelous, highly figurative garden description by Ibn Gabirol⁴ inadvertently discloses the medieval conception of the different nature of male and female expressive activity. It describes the winter's sky as writing a letter to the earth "with the ink of its rains and showers and the pen of its flashing lightnings." Man writes. Woman's is a silent art: "Therefore, when earth longed to see the sky, she embroidered on the twigs of her flowerbeds something like the stars."⁵

In medieval Europe, "however much outnumbered by men and however much excluded from the literary canon, women did write perceptions of reality."⁶ Yet in medieval Judaism and Islam⁷ writing was considered an exclusively male competence. Hence the central place occupied by the praise of calligraphy in panegyrics addressed to men.⁸ The pen was depicted as a sublimation of man's virility and braveness and is often likened to his sword. Pen and penis were identified as instruments and symbols of male fertility (as is also implied metaphorically in Ibn Gabirol's poem). Authorship and authority were thus intimately linked. He who is authorized by society to be an author (i.e., the literate male) is also the one who exercises authority over those who do not write.

The only possible instance of a Hebrew poem written by a woman is one ascribed to the wife of Dunash Ben-Labrat. Though the authenticity of ascription is meticulously discussed by Ezra Fleischer,⁹ it seems improbable that the wife of the first poet of the Hebrew Spanish school could produce a poem so ripe and sensitive as to almost outdo her pioneering husband's entire oeuvre. Even if we accept her as the author of this exquisite poem, the fact that she left no successors still makes this poem the exception that proves that women were *not* writers.

To be honest, we must add that women, "the Fourth Estate" of medieval society, were not the only silent class. Medieval literature was written predominately by, and for, the aristocratic and clerical circles, leaving no room for the expression of the middle and lower classes. The rare synthesis of religious and secular cultures (and of Arabic and Jewish-Hebrew literatures) achieved during the Golden Age in Spain represented the small social milieu of courtier-rabbis. The Jewish masses who did not undergo the full process of acculturation to Arabic society remained estranged from this courtly civilization.¹⁰

S. D. Goitein summarized the divergent sexual mores of the different social classes in medieval Islam and Jewry:

The opulent and mighty, the more they felt themselves secure in their wealth and power, the more *they loosened their tongues and secluded their wives*. The literateurs who frequented the courts of the princes and the palaces of the rich, have provided us with abundant and unrestrained reports about sex as it was discussed and practiced in those circles. Some of the sophisticated leaders of religious law and thought, who feared God but were confident of their own merits and trusted in God's mercy were similarly inclined to allow themselves certain freedoms with regard to sex and other matters, and did not mince words on such topics. At the other end of the social ladder, the people who were not *masiur*—literally not covered, nor protected by their means, family and social standing, in short not respectable—*had had little power to seclude their wives, and no cause to restrain their tongues*. Their voice is heard in the chronologically later parts of *Thousands Nights* and *a Night* and in similar literature.¹¹

The Geniza documents, studied by Goitein, are unique in that we hear in them "the unadulterated voice of the common man, when he speaks in private . . . not voicing opinions" (p. 44). They also provide the literary scholar with a more detailed picture of the wider social setting in which the literature of the Spanish Jewish courtier-rabbis flourished.

Yet, the nature of the relationship between this world of lived experience (as preserved by the Geniza) and the symbolic world of imagination (embodied in literature) remains to be discussed. Literature, as we know, does not merely mirror the world but rather conceptualizes it. As Joseph Weiss has shown in his brilliant paper on Jewish "Courtly Culture and Courtly Poetry" in Spain,¹² idealization is one way of conceptualizing a world and acting in it. A society creates a

"possible world" in words in order to state its values and *raison d'être* and in order to preserve both them and itself.

If we add that the nobility . . . are more easily able, both conceptually and practically, to elaborate holistic, complex and sophisticated textual 'possible worlds,' it is easier to understand why our study of medieval literature tends to be a study of medieval aristocratic literature.¹³

Thus, while historical documents enable us to detect implicit ideologies, it is only through this aristocratic (male) literary production that we can explore the place women were granted in the conceptual "possible worlds" created by men.

In discussing the images and roles of women in this society, we will have to ask not only how social conditions are described and reflected, but also what function this symbolic treatment plays in preserving mentalities and propagating values through literature. I propose to demonstrate that the socially determined function of a text is not external to it, but rather has direct and profound effects on its internal structure. I shall analyze the representation of women in different genres: first, in the "male" love lyric, where women are expected to be silent, then in *wedding poems*, where, as brides, they gain the right of speech; in the *maqamat*, where as wives they lose that right because "they speak too much" and in the feminine *kharjas*, where women's expressions of love are openly pronounced. For the sake of brevity, I shall not treat the representation of women in religious poetry where the feminine allegorical speaker predominates—her right of speech bought at the price of her misery and penance.¹⁴ I will try to show how the "speech situation," by which I mean the roles of speaker and addressee, and the rules of communicative competence (involving what one can or cannot say in a conversation), determine societal attitudes and are simultaneously determined by them.

The "Mute Beauty" in Male Love Lyrics

The bulk of medieval Hebrew love lyrics is cast in the mold of the dramatic monologue: a man in love addresses an absent lady, implores her to listen to him, to stop victimizing him and to respond to his advances. The following is a typical lover's monologue by Judah Halevi:

לקראת חלל חשקך קרב החזיקי
 ובאש נדוד האהבה הוליקי,
 מאסת בי, על בן תריקין לי חנית,
 ואני בנפשי אַמאָסה — הריקי!
 רעית צבי, לא טוב היות דודך שבי —
 קרבי ורקבי הנדוד הריחיקי.
 ערש דני הפכי לערש תענוג —
 ודבש וחלב אוהבך הניקי!

Go on fighting [me] the victim of your love
and kindling love with the fire of separation!
As much as you detest me, and therefore draw your sword against me,
So do I detest my own soul. So, go on draw it!
Oh you gazelle, what benefit is there in your lover being captive?
Draw near and send away the chariots of separation!
Turn the sickbed into a love bower,
Feed your love at the breast with milk and honey!¹⁵

It is the lover's petitionary posture that determines the rhetorical strategy of his speech. The dream-lady never succumbs to his compliments and pleas. Love in this poetry remains ever one sided and unconsummated. The poetic love situation never develops. No real action takes place apart from the lover's speech. His supplications, imperatives, rhetorical questions and, at times, even threats, are thus pure illocutionary speech acts, i.e., acts performed by the very action of speech itself.

Physical descriptions of the beloved, when they occur, are an integral part of this flattering persuasive technique. There is a fixed rhetorical and figurative inventory aimed at gaining her love and favors. The gazelle's bright face surrounded by her black hair is likened to moon or dawn and even said to outshine them; or else she is a miraculous midnight sun. Her face is crystal, her cheeks and lips like red rubies—or the crimson blood of her lovers. Her curled locks are likened to black snakes or scorpions surrounding and defending the rose garden which is her cheeks, or the fruit (apples, pomegranates) orchard of her breasts.¹⁶ The superiority of one beloved to all others is not expressed by completely newly-coined imagery, but is rather a matter of degree. She is rendered unique either by a slight and sophisticated variation of the familiar motifs, or by the superlative mode. Her thought, emotions and personal traits are however excluded from the description, which thus remains strictly external.¹⁷ The beloved's only emotional virtue is, indeed, her vice: her cruelty to her lovers. And in this, too, she is depicted as unique by the aid of rhetoric. Her heart is a rock; her breasts stone-apples or sharpened spears; her locks venomous serpents; her gaze pointed arrows. She is a frail gazelle, a dangerous lion and a fierce hunter—all in one. Stone and iron connote her frigidity, while the wide range of the warlike vocabulary renders her a dauntless fighter. (These are clearly inverted metaphors of the male chivalric imagination.)

In the power relationship within the poem the woman is the strong party, while the loving man is always described as weak and disarmed. Inasmuch as the beloved's portrayal is external, his, the lover's, is internal. He speaks about emotions and afflictions, and mentions inner

parts of the body (heart, ribs, kidneys) affected by her cruelty. Hyperbolic language is used to describe the uniqueness of his suffering and the extremes of his love and passion. She dwells eternally in his heart; or else, she steals his heart and sleep; his eyes pour rivers and showers of tears which cannot extinguish the fire of love she has kindled inside his body.

In his discussion of the love lyric, Scheindlin (p. 85) justly comments that the reader "is confronted with the paradox of poets stating a claim of uniqueness for themselves and their beloveds by means of great stock of clichés: thus the style of their work is at odds with one of its dominant themes." Scheindlin resolves this paradox by suggesting that "as a lover he speaks of his suffering to demonstrate to the beloved his worthiness; but as a poet he is also addressing an audience." I fully agree with the distinction made here between the speaker's two different capacities—namely, as a suffering lover (within the text) who aims at impressing a lady, and as a poet (in the wider context) whose utmost desire is to outdo other poets. This distinction, I would argue, is the crux of the matter and, as I will later elaborate, is the only way to fully understand these poems written by men about women. Scheindlin, however, blurs his own distinction when he interposes "lover" and "poet" by saying that it is the poet who displays "a sensitivity so extreme . . . as if to say: 'such is my capacity for submission to the power of beauty'." From here he goes on to say that these poets "used poetry . . . to articulate their devotion to beauty as a cardinal value of spiritual life," and to generalize that "this genre manages to be sensual without being sexual" (p. 88) since it "deals not with sex but with beauty" (p. 89).

Must we accept that both speech situations, that of the lover who addresses a woman and that of the poet who tries to impress an audience, are in the same service of "beauty" and "spiritual love"? Is the adoration of beauty not part of the seductive discourse of the fictional lover, while the "real" poet winks behind the lover's shoulder to a real audience? When the poets claim that their beloved is beyond description, that her charms surpass all praise, that they cannot effectively be listed or captured in rhetorical conceits, then they also declare their awareness of belonging to a long rhetorical tradition. This tradition was "the product of men talking to other men about women. The canonical legacy of description is a legacy shared predominantly by the male imagination; . . . a battle between men that is figuratively fought out on the fields of woman's 'celebrated body'."¹⁸ When Shmuel Hanagid says:

אולם כבר שערז אישים, אשר אין בתוך / ארץ אלהים יפיפה כמותיכי.
למה בפור תקרעי עין שחורה ועל / מה תצבעי באגוז אדם שפתיכי?

Men have sung indeed that there is none next
 to you in beauty on God's earth.
 Why then do you have to blacken your eyes
 and redden your lips?¹⁹

he evidently refers to this legacy of description. The *maqama* literature provides spectacular illustrations of improvisational after-dinner poetic games held in male company and dedicated to the theme of women's description.²⁰

In this context the themes of the love lyric are not a mere "ritual expression of an ideal [of beauty and spiritual love] shared by their social class,"²¹ but rather a means of control: "Description within a like context clearly serves the describer, not the described . . . for to describe, is in a sense, to control, to possess, and ultimately to use to one's own hands."²² What might sound a typical argument of contemporary feminist criticism is fully compatible with Goitein's observations based on Geniza documents:

Recorded history seems to suggest that human males have a tendency to form more or less compact groups, from which the individual derives a position of strength. Such strength is needed and used in manifold ways, among them to help the male overcome the female. . . . The men who left us their writings in the Geniza believed that the princess's place is in the innermost corner of the house, that women should be confined to the narrow circle of the family.²³

A silent lady, this fantasy created by men, enables gentlemen to talk about sex without endangering the chasteness of their real women. Concealing crude sex with an apparition of "the service of beauty and spiritual love" is but a lip-service which on the one hand stirs men's imagination, and on the other leaves their women untouched. By the same token, and in the name of the age-old double-standard applied to men's and women's sexuality, men can go on complaining about their beloved's remoteness (*nedod*, separation)²⁴ and continue secluding them behind veils, walls, in innermost rooms²⁵ and behind symbolical walls of silence. The silent coquette or *femme fatale* attracts men, but at the same time she is blamed for her speechlessness and separation. "The male's incapacity of 'talking' to a woman"²⁶ is transformed by the poets to the female's cruelty in hiding herself and in keeping silent. (But woe to the woman who does reveal herself or speak to men in public!) The flood of words spent on men's suffering and weakness and on women's power in domineering men's emotions inverts the truth of social conditions; only man could exercise "free" love, but the blame was on the woman who did so—the object of temptation became the cause. Thus the love lyric is not a mere reflection of women's status in society but an instrument by which [male] society preserves the existing "order of things."

The "Garrulous Shrew" in Maqama Literature

In the maqamas, the mute beauty turns into a "nagging wife whose torrent of words is let loose by marriage." Debax, in his analysis of comedies by Jonson, Molière and others, identifies this phenomenon as essentially one of power:²⁷

To reduce woman to silence is to reduce her to powerlessness. . . . Thus . . . woman's will to revolt necessarily passes through the use of language, the tongue. . . . If she continues to make herself heard [after marriage] she becomes a "shrew," she becomes guilty of "amazonian impudence." . . . This defiance is the response to intolerance; for man only one authority is conceivable, his own, one sex, his own, one discourse, therefore, his own. . . . Thus the trick is played: a difference of behaviour, of sex, of appearance, etc., is interpreted in terms of an opposition of contraries: if man is strong, woman is weak; if man speaks woman must be silent. So was created an image of woman in negativity to that which man was forging of himself.

The following endless list of material worldly goods²⁸ pours out of the mouth of a greedy, ugly and capricious newlywed wife right after the wedding ceremony:

vessels of silver and of gold, gowns, earrings and bracelets and veils, a house and dwelling, chairs and candelabra, table and spoons, pestle and seeds, a coverlet and spindle, a mat and washbasin, basket and distaff, a pot and a bottle and a kettle, a mortar and broom and kerchief, a pan, furnace and stove, a barrel for water and goblets, and scoops and vessels and bowls, scent boxes and cloaks, veils and turbans and festive dresses and linen garments, noserings and mirrors, handbags and crescents, amulets and ornaments, woven linen and fine linen, headdresses, rings and headbands, ankelets and anklebands—and besides all these: lovely clothes for the Sabbath, festivals and holidays.²⁹

In fact, this woman is not the perfect maiden whom Zerah, the protagonist of the maqama, saw (veiled and silent) the day before the wedding. The latter was replaced for the former by an old, deceitful and ugly matchmaking lady.

Besides its comic effect, this device of a fooled husband and a replaced bride³⁰ betrays one of the deepest of man's fears, namely, finding out that the beloved maiden has become an unbearable spouse and that greed and speech have replaced chastity and silence. In a similar rhymed story in Yehuda Alḥarizi's *Taḥkemoni*, the bridegroom finds when uncovering his bride's face:

And lo! her face was of fright and her voice as the sound of thunder. Her figure was like Jeroboam's calf and her mouth was like Balaam's ass, and

the breath from her nose was putrid. The natural bloom had fled from her cheeks as though the devil had doubled them with blackness, and worked them with coals, so that I thought her of the daughters of Ham. But if her visage was blacker than coal, her hair was white, and her days had waxed old—and her lips protruded lightly from above, and her teeth were as the teeth of wolves and bears. And her eyes were the eyes of scorpions.³¹

It is noteworthy that her voice, mouth, breath and lips—all metonymic of her speech—occupy much of the description, and that ugliness, beastliness, old age, putridity and danger are all combined in her visage. Terrified, the groom improvises a poem whereupon he detects his bride's demonic lineage. She derives from devils and monsters; among her family and close companions are found the angels of fury and destruction, the Goat-Demon (שעיר לעזאזל), Lilith, the queen of demons, and the Angel of Death himself. First thing after finishing his song he muzzles her *mouth* and then breaks three new whips on her back, continuing to beat her "until the blood of her heart came to her mouth./ Then [he] I tore her flesh off/ until her hymen blood ran over her body." And then he flees. Note that the analogy between the flow from her mouth and from her vagina metaphorically identifies woman's speech and her sexuality.³²

Such plots and descriptions were intended both to entertain and to teach a moral lesson. The audience of the *maqama* literature, though probably wider than that of courtly aristocratic poetry, was not necessarily that of the very common people. Furthermore, the eloquence and extensive use of literary (biblical and talmudic) sources indicate that the *maqama* was written neither for an illiterate readership nor for women, who did not understand the language. The crudeness of such episodes suggests, however, that they operated as sessions of "dirty jokes" which are not to be told in mixed company (if such even existed). Certain chapters in Alḥarizi and Immanuel of Rome show that such anecdotes were told, and improvised, in respected gatherings of poets. As in classical poetry, poets endeavored to outdo each other in composing original variations on familiar themes. Contests and improvisation sessions were held to praise "the good woman" (which as a rhetorical type was inherited from the classical love lyric) as well as to defame "the bad one" (who, as a prevalent theme, was the innovation of this kind of literature).³³

It would be a mistake, however, to believe that these antifeminist views were the exclusive property of comic anecdotes and rhetorical games. They were no doubt in accord with the thought of serious philosophers, moralists and mystics in the Middle Ages (with only marginal differences between Jews, Moslems and Christians). Here I

have to totally disagree with Roth, who states that "it would be erroneous to draw conclusions about the real status of women or attitudes to them in Spanish Jewish society from these literary themes . . . [which] were intended to delight and to amuse as much as to warn" (pp. 163–64). In my view, the Hebrew *maqamas* not only reflected these "higher" philosophical notions (seasoned with wit and humor), but they also served as instruments in propagating them in wider circles of society.

It is not accidental then that the flourishing of the Hebrew *maqama* in the later part of the twelfth century, and especially from the thirteenth on, coincided with the heyday of Aristotelian philosophy which devalued women to the extreme. Maimonides, like all Jewish Aristotelians, associated women with matter and considered them an obstacle in man's ascent to the highest degree of Intellect. Women cannot aspire to become intellectual, and hence have no chance to enter the Next World.³⁴ In Islam "women were generally seen as the lower rung of the spiritual ladder."³⁵ "They are of little intelligence; to consult with women and then to act contrary to their advice is an oft-quoted *hadith*."³⁶ "To be married to a talkative misbehaving spouse was considered to be substitute for hellfire."³⁷ "Women are impure, stupid and dangerous. . . . The greatest obstacles for the spiritual wayfarer [are compared] to her menstruation."³⁸ In Christian Aristotelian thought, too, women were considered "a threat to man's salvation,"³⁹ since they were "inevitably connected with the things of this world, with personal affections, desires, and with possessions."⁴⁰

The corruption of this world was said to have its cause in woman. The hatred of everything worldly was always linked with a deep aversion to women.⁴¹ The metaphor of the world as an ugly old crone, a rotten prostitute who entices men, was thus used widely by ascetics and poets alike.⁴² Descriptions of "real" old ugly women in *maqamas*⁴³ were undoubtedly realizations (and inversions) of this metaphor of the ascetics. This "tendency to see all the dreaded (and hence hated) aspects of life in woman," and especially the association of their alleged impurity and menstruation with evil, uncontrollable powers led logically to their total demonization.⁴⁴ Intrinsic negative views of women in Jewish society (i.e., female impurity in general, and especially in menstruation), were thus influenced and reinforced by the surrounding cultures.

In this context, *maqama* literature served as a declared antifeminist (and anti-marriage) propaganda, with the "wiles of women" motif as one of its strong cards. *Minḥat Yehuda* by Ibn Shabbetai started a centuries-long literary controversy which continued in Spain, Provence and Italy.⁴⁵

The Bride's Speech in Wedding Poems

Wedding ceremonies mark a sharp line between premarital and marital love: the former is illicit, or else unconsummated and unilateral, while the latter, the union of husband and wife, is said to be mutual, harmonious and satisfying to both partners. Although the love lyric, which is dedicated to the former kind of love, and the wedding poem, which is dedicated to the latter, have much in common, both are markedly different in mood. It is only in dialogues in wedding poems that the "speech worlds" of "real," not allegorical, men and women truly meet. Upon entering the marriage state, the mute beauty of the love lyric is suddenly granted the faculty of speech. And it is this gift that turns into a curse when, as the maqama tells us, the bride overnight becomes the nagging wife. "Marriage—or union—reveals her sex. . . . According to the dominant masculine theory her self-affirmation should stop there, and she should acquire speech only to abandon it at once."⁴⁶ The moment of the wedding ceremony is then the only instance when her speech is daringly erotic, and at the same time socially accepted and respected:

אֶקְרָא לְךָ נְחֻלַּת חֻלְקִי
הֵנָּךְ מְאֹד יָפָה דּוּדִי אַתָּה אֱלֹהִים אֵל יָדִי
רַק לְךָ אֶתְּנֶה דּוּדִי וְתִלִּין בִּבְיִן שְׂדִי:

I will call you my lot and my portion,
You are handsome, my beloved,
God sent you to me!
To you alone I will give my love
And you will lie between my breasts.⁴⁷

If silence is a symbolic counterpart of chastity, then the bride's speech signals the imminent loss of virginity in marriage. In this context the loss of virginity is blessed by God and society since it is connected with the religious duty of procreation. It is worthwhile noting that in wedding poems not only is the bride's role in the dialogue more important than the groom's, but it is also more sexually open than his. It is she who reminds him to seek sexual satisfaction in marriage:⁴⁸

הֵנָּה דּוּדִי יְדִידַת אֶעֱוֹרֶר
אֶהְבֶּתִּי מִתְּנוּאוֹת אֶבְרֶר
בְּאַמְנוּהָ וְאַמַּת לְךָ אֶשׁוּרֶר!
בֹּא יְדִידִי בֹא לְבֵית בִּתְּיָדִיבִים נִתְעַלְסָה בְּאַהֲבִיבִים:

Here I am my beloved! I shall stir your affection
And cleanse my love of disobedience.
Faithfully and truly I shall sing unto you:
Come my beloved to the house of a nobleman's daughter,
Let us delight in love!⁴⁹

Whereas in the love lyric the ideal desired love is located out of the social sphere, in wedding poems the setting is supremely social. These poems were usually intended to be read or sung during the ceremony by the audience: the families and the noble guests. Society is often represented by the poem's speaker, who assumes the role of the community spokesman. He is the one who addresses the couple, praises their respective virtues (usually the bride's physical beauty and the groom's spiritual value) and their distinguished pedigrees, invites the guests to drink and be merry, and above all assures the young couple that their union is consecrated and blessed by God and men. His main role, however, is in encouraging the young and inexperienced groom to overcome his natural bashfulness and approach his bride.

Time and again the emphasis is on the purity and absence of danger in marital love. This is done by purposefully inverting (or rather deconstructing) the conventional imagery of the love lyric. The bride is depicted as being a ravishing beauty, no less than any of the ladies lauded by the poets, but hers is a beauty devoid of pain and danger. Eros and Thanatos, so intimately bound up in the love lyric, are here separated. The speaker, who serves as a kind of master of ceremonies, addresses the groom:

עתות דודים קרבו

[. . .]

לרעות תוך גנייה
ללקט שושנייה:

דודה רד מהתתאחר
לערוגת אהבה סורה

[. . .]

שמרם מעינים

רמני סעיה רזה

צעיף צפעונייה

כי תוציאם מאחר

אין רוש בפתייה:

אך את מהם אל תירא

The time for love making has come!

Go down, why do you tarry

To pasture in her garden?

She keeps her fresh pomegranates out of sight,

But you, do not fear when she brings them out

From behind the veil of her serpents—

For her snakes have no venom.⁵⁰

And similarly the groom tells his bride:

מרחוק לבבות נשך:

אכל השלם לך

נחש בלחי ימשך שערך

צפעוני

Your hair stretches along

Your cheek like a snake

Biting hearts from afar!

A serpent indeed,

But a peaceful one!⁵¹

Her cheeks (or her body) are nothing less than the Garden of Eden, and temptation is positive and desirable. Even the serpent, that agent of Original Sin, is here transformed into a positive symbol.

Two biblical subtexts serve in wedding poems as sources for recurrent allusions: the prelapsarian love of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and the love of the bride and groom in the Song of Songs. The first suggests a mythical primordial harmony: All marriages are replications of the coupling of Adam and Eve, and thus are blessed with the same blessing of "be fruitful and multiply." But since the sin is neutralized, he who eats the forbidden fruit will eat and live forever. The bride is Eve before the Fall and the loving Shulamith, all in one. Her body is both Eden and the virginal Enclosed Garden (*gan na'ul*). Since the Song of Songs was traditionally interpreted as a religious allegory celebrating the union of God with the Congregation of Israel, the frequent allusions to this biblical source adorn the wedding poems with a further touch of solemnity.

The Kharjas as "Maiden Songs"

In sharp contrast to the "male" classical love lyric—where men are the initiators of love, its victims and its poets—stand the *kharjas*, those concluding lines of *muwashshah* poems, in which women's erotic utterances have been captured and preserved. The *muwashshahat* themselves, a poetic invention of the sophisticated and luxurious courts of Al-Andalus, were prosodically intricate and rhetorically elaborate strophic panegyrics and love songs. The Arabic and Hebrew poets who composed them (usually for a female singer, or a women's choir) used to conclude these pieces of "high" courtly poetry with a final couplet in the vernacular (either the old Spanish or the Arabic) jargon. (The Arabic term for this couplet—*kharja*—denotes their location as a finale of the poem.) The hybrid nature of the *muwashshah* and its *kharja* (courtly but popular, literary and vernacular, "masculine" and also "feminine") gave rise to ambiguous attitudes on the part of the literary elite. Generally, their attitude was negative, with occasional outbursts of enthusiasm. In the latter cases it was especially the *kharja* which was lauded as the poem's "jewel" and "spice."

For modern readers, the *kharja* opens a window to the hidden domain of women: to that realm where women do speak and sing and love. The frigid and mute beloved of the "male" love lyric is replaced here by young women who express emotions of *their* unrequited love, and more rarely, transports of joy and ecstasy in consummated love:

What shall I do, or what will become of me, beloved?
Do not withdraw from me. [16]⁵²

Pity me, pity me, handsome one—tell me,
Why in God's name would you kill me? [26]

As if you were a stranger,
You no longer fall asleep on my breast. [7]

Easter comes again without him—
How my heart [burns] for him! [4]

When my Cidello comes—
That's good news!

Like a sunray he arises
over Wadi-l-hijara. [3]

Here men are cruel and women the victims:

Oh lord, how shall I bear a life
with this deceiver,
Who, even before he greets a girl
threatens to leave her! [6]

When necessary she voices her refusal:

Don't touch me, my love,
I do not want him who hurts me.
My breast is sensitive,
Stop, I refuse all lovers. [8]

or knows how to stimulate his sexual imagination:

I'll give you much love! but only if you'll bend
my anklets right over to my earrings. [29]

But usually she is inexperienced and often consults with her mother:

What shall I do mother?
My lover is at the door! [14]

I do not want to wear a necklace, mother—
the dress is enough for me.
My lord will see a pure white throat—
he won't want jewelry. [11]

Take me out of this plight—
my state is desperate!
Mother, what shall I do?—
The falcon is about to snatch. [27]

or addresses her girlfriends:

Ah tell me, little sisters,
how to hold my pain!
I'll not live without my beloved—
I shall fly to seek him again. [4]

or visits a (female) fortuneteller:

If you truly are a fortuneteller,
Tell me when my beloved Ishaq will come. [2]

A thirteenth-century authority on the *muwashshaḥ*, Ibn Sana al-Mulk, already noted that women were frequently (though not exclusively) the speakers in *kharjas*. Modern scholars have advanced the hypothesis that the *kharjas* are intrinsically feminine in style, and that they originated from popular, feminine oral poetry (which had been lost).⁵³ One may corroborate their thesis by pointing to certain expressions which occur in penultimate sections of the *muwashshaḥ* poems themselves, right before the *kharja*, which have hitherto gone unnoticed. I refer here to phrases like *shir ya'ala* or *shir 'alma* ("a maiden's song," "a gazelle's song") which are undoubtedly intended to introduce the *kharja*. After the generic reference:

ליל לא אֶרְאֶה בְּתַנּוּמוֹת
צֶלְמְךָ [. . .] אֶצְעָקָה [. . .]
שִׁיר עֲלָמוֹת:

The night when thine image
I cannot see
I shall cry out
In a maiden's song

there follows an evidently feminine, Arabic vernacular *kharja*:

Oh dove, oh [. . .]
Oh my love,
Where have you fled
Not coming to me?⁵⁴

Other expressions like: "He sings like a graceful gazelle," or "He shall sing like a maiden" also enhance the introduction of a feminine song and the intrusion of a female speaker. Another phrase appearing in the penultimate unit pertains to the erotic content of the *kharja* and serves as a generic qualification, e.g., "And out of love/she shall complete a song of love," or "She enticeth him in a song of passion."

These phrases were, no doubt, the equivalent of generic terms like the Latin *cantica puellarium* (maidens' songs) or *cantica amatoria* (love songs) referred to by Church authorities in the early Middle Ages and forbidden for their pagan, erotic (and essentially feminine) nature. (In this context we are reminded of Maimonides, who similarly prohibited the singing of secular *muwashshaḥat*, especially when sung by women, for they arouse the spirit of fornication.) Later medieval feminine poetic forms (like the German tenth- and eleventh-century *winileodas*, the German twelfth-century *frauenlieder*, and the thirteenth-century Portuguese *cantiga de amigo*) show traits similar to those of the *kharjas*.

The *kharjas* are also compact repositories of information on Andalusian society. They afford indirect but authentic evidence of the relations between the heterogeneous religious groups in Spain. Phrases like: "A maiden who spoke to him in the tongue of the Ishmaelites" (or: "She sings an Aramaean [i.e. Romance] song." or: "In Edomite" [i.e., Romance]) reveal that vernacular Arabic and the mixed Mozarabic were spoken by all inhabitants of the peninsula and constituted the language of popular song, especially that of women. They also afford evidence of love affairs between individuals of the different groups.

How did these outstanding couplets get to be incorporated into aristocratic literature? Or, to put it differently, how did classical literature allow this invasion of popular influences? What was it that attracted the male poets to listen to these feminine voices, to quote them in direct speech, and, in later generations, even to imitate them? Was it their delight in quaint, folkloristic elements or their way of renewing the conventional love lyric?

However the case may be, with the intrusion of a female speaker at the end of the "masculine" poem, the poets were confronted with visible compositional problems. This is attested to by the manifold devices they had to invent in order to tie the beginning of the poem with its ending. The easy case was a "regular" love poem, where after the familiar dramatic monologue of the male lover there followed the answer of the woman (namely a quotation of a "maiden's song") in the *kharja*. Homosexual love poems and panegyrics where both praiser and praised were males required a more complicated solution. The transition had to occur in the penultimate unit of the poem, right before the quoted *kharja*. The reference to a generic term (a "gazelle's song": a "love song") which I discussed above was one possibility. An extensively used device in panegyrics was the emergence of a third, feminine figure, toward the end of the poem, who turned the dual relationship of "praiser" and "praised" into a triangular love relationship. For example, the departure of the noble praised gentlemen afflicts not only the praiser but also the woman who loves this gentleman, whereupon she sings a "passionate song," or the poet-speaker loves her, but she loves the object of his praise.⁵⁵

An astonishing fact is that for whatever reason many more mozarabic *kharjas* survived in Hebrew *muwashshahat* than in their Arabic equivalent. The process of canonization of the Arabic *muwashshah* brought about the suppression of the Romance and the feminine elements. At first, so it is assumed, the "feminine climate" persisted also in *kharjas* composed in the Arabic vernacular. But later, with the introduction of *kharjas* written in the literary Arabic, the feminine nature eventually disappeared.

In the present paper I examined portrayals and stereotypes of women in male-authored medieval Hebrew texts and showed how these tropes of male authority had served to mythologize woman (and man's desire for women) in order to sanction "the existing order of things" in society and culture. Literature is not merely a form of sublimated expression and elevated entertainment, but rather, a means by which a society creates—and defends—its working myths. Thus, while it is useless to blame a culture for the antifeminist values it had advocated centuries ago, it is imperative that modern scholars cross the line between a purely descriptive method and a critical explication of the literary means used by a culture to carry out its aims.

In this respect, scholarship and criticism of medieval Hebrew poetry tended hitherto to be as misogynist as the texts they examined. In dealing with the love lyrics, for instance, most critics have been so enchanted with the very fact that this "universal" poetry about love and sex (which apparently contradicts the accepted puritanical image of medieval Judaism) was written by revered rabbis and philosophers, that they have been reluctant to expose the "invisible" and not-so-invisible aspects of "sexual politics" embedded in these texts. Likewise, scholars so enjoyed revealing the humor and parodic talents of serious medieval authors (especially in describing "negative" women in *maqamas*), that they neglected to see how this literature served to marginalize, control, and eventually to oppress women. More often than not, scholars would join the hilarity of the *maqama's* (male) audience at a satirical jibe at an ugly and wicked woman, and then would naively comment that "not all women were like that; some were also good, obedient and faithful," as if to confirm that a "good woman" was always in short order. One should also take into account aspects of the modern scholarly agenda—its preoccupation with reestablishing and publishing the Great Works of medieval Hebrew literature, or the more recent reappropriations of these texts in the name of esthetics and formalist principles—that have historically delayed the critical approach attempted here: the representation of women in this literature.

As far as I know, mine is the first sortie in the latter direction. What I have tried to show is that the absence of the female voice and the various stereotypes of women were all aspects of a tradition that idealized women in order to silence them; that mythologized women in order to maintain their inferiority.

NOTES

1. In Hayim Schirmann, ed., *Hashirah ha'ivrit bisfarad uviprovence*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem-Tel Aviv, 1971), 1:152. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.
2. *Ibid.*, 2:58.
3. Quoted from C. Brooke-Rose, "Women as a Semiotic Object," *Poetics Today* 6 (1985): 15-16.
4. Schirmann, 1:219.
5. Translated by Raymond P. Scheindlin in *Wine, Women, & Death: Medieval Hebrew Poems on the Good Life* (Philadelphia, 1986), p. 10.
6. K. M. Wilson, *Medieval Women Writers* (Athens, Georgia, 1984), p. viii.
7. On the contribution of Arabic pre-Islamic poetesses to the oral tradition of poetry, see A. L. F. Beeston, ed., *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyid Period* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 85-88.
8. For more about this theme, see I. Levin, "The Pen and the Rider" [Hebrew], in *Papers on Medieval Hebrew Literature presented to A.M. Habermann*, ed. Z. Malachi (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 156-62.
9. E. Fleischer, "On Dunash Ben Labrat, His Wife and His Son" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 5 (1984): 189-202.
10. For detailed discussions cf. J. Weiss, "Courtly Culture and Courtly Poetry" [Hebrew], in *The Proceedings of the First International Congress for Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1952), and Scheindlin's introduction to *Wine, Women, & Death*.
11. See "The Sexual Mores of the Common People," in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, ed. A. L. Sayyid-Marsot (Malibu, 1977), p. 43. The emphases are mine. "The Geniza people," says Goitein, "represent a fair cross-section of the Arabic-speaking population of the Mediterranean, from . . . the East to Morocco and Spain" (p. 46). Regarding the seclusion of women, concubinage with slave girls and homosexuality, Goitein shows that there was no marked difference between Moslems and Jews, and that "the social notions of the majority population were very influential" (*ibid.*, p. 48).
12. See note 10 above.
13. K. Boklund-Logopoulou, "Towards a Socio-Semiotics of Written Texts: Some Functions of Texts in Medieval England" [Paper presented at the Colloquium on Semiotics and History] (Bloomington, Indiana, 1983), p. 22.
14. Though I cannot enlarge upon feminine lamentations whose theme lies outside the present paper, a brief excursus might be in order. The best examples are a group of strophic poems by Judah Halevi. For references see I. Levin, 'Al mot [The Lamentation Over the Dead] (Hakibbutz Haneuchad, 1973), p. 259, notes 15, 16, 18, 21. For a translated example see T. Carmi's *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, pp. 339-40. My conjecture is that these Hebrew lamentations (which are characterized by informal prosody, balladic atmosphere, folkloristic themes, unsophisticated imagery, colloquial language, and often by female speakers) were inspired by popular feminine, vernacular strophic examples. Judah Halevi, when adapting this feminine poetry to "high" literature, sought established strophic models, which he probably found in liturgical poetry. Mourning and chanting lamentations were indeed considered the province of women. For oral lamentations by pre-Islamic poetesses which were later included in the classical canon see Beeston, pp. 85-88.
15. *Diwan des Jehuda ha-Levi*, ed. Hayim Brody (Berlin, 1884-1930), 2:34.
16. Poems which attest to these (and the subsequent) themes are abundant. For English translations see *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, pp. 312, 324, 325, 343, 412, 423; and Scheindlin, pp. 90-122. For discussions of the thematics of the love lyric, see

Scheindlin, pp. 77-89; and Dan Pagis, *Shirat haḥol vetorat hashir leMoshe ibn Ezra usnei doro* [The Secular Poetry and Poetics of Moses Ibn Ezra and His Contemporaries] (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 267-77.

17. Though love poems were classified by Arabic treatises on poetics as "panegyrics to women" (see Pagis, p. 152), there was a significant difference between those virtues praised in male panegyrics (generosity, wisdom, courage, power, education, rhetorical competence) and the single virtue addressed to women (beauty). An Arabic writer confesses the difficulty in praising (and lamenting) women (Levin, 'Al mot, p. 88).

18. Compare the analogous problem faced by Shakespeare as discussed in N.J. Vickers, "This Heraldry in Lucrece's Face," *Poetics Today* 6 (1985): 171.

19. Schirmann, *Hashirah ha'ivrit* 1:152. The first line here reads: כּבֵּר שַׁעֲרֵי אִישִׁים כִּי יִפְהַפִּיחַ כְּמוֹתֵיבֵי אִין. If, as Schirmann comments, שַׁעֲרֵי means "acknowledged," then the verb refers to the noun "men" as meaning "lovers." But if, as I understand it, the verb takes the meaning of the same Arabic root (from which the word for poetry [shī'r] derives), then the verb refers to "men-poets," and to the male poetic tradition.

20. See examples by Al-Ḥarizi quoted and translated by Scheindlin.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

22. Vickers, pp. 176, 181.

23. From the introduction to his indispensable discussion of "The World of Women" in vol. 3 [The Family] of his *A Mediterranean Society* (Berkeley, 1978), p. 312.

24. The Bedouin theme of separation as a symbol of geographical distance is converted into a symbol of social distance (i.e., seclusion).

25. Poetic examples abound. The following come from Hanagid's collection of moralistic epigrams. See D. Yarden, vol. 2 of *Divan Shmuel Hanagid, Ben Mishle* (Jerusalem, 1982):

Walls and castles were created for the woman.

... Her face is like private parts exposed in public

That have to be covered by scarves and veils.

(No. 723)

Who listens and keeps silent without quarrel and deceit?

I answered: The innocent one.

... And where are chasteness, virtue and righteousness?

I answered: In a noblewoman who stays indoors.

(No. 463)

Recurring expressions like: כְּבוֹדָהּ בַּת פְּנִימָה, יֵלֶת חֲדָרִים, חֲדָרֵי חֲדָרִים refer also to women's seclusion.

26. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, p. 313. Goitein illustrates it with the anecdote of the prince who, after enjoying an exquisite meal served to him by his newlywed wife, complained that he had nobody to talk to, whereupon the understanding wife brought in her two brothers.

27. J. P. Debax, "Et voilà pourquoi votre femme est muette" (1980), as quoted by C. Brooke-Rose in "Woman as a Semiotic Object," p. 16.

28. Compare this to a similar list in *The Cantos of Immanuel of Rome*, ed. D. Yarden (Jerusalem, 1957), p. 31.

29. In the maqama *Minḥat Yehuda* (unambiguously subtitled *Sone hanashim*) by Isaac Halevi ibn Shabbetai, and written ca. 1300. The above passage follows N. Roth's translation in "The 'Wiles of Women' Motif in the Medieval Hebrew Literature of Spain," *Hebrew Annual Review* 2 (1978): 152. For the Hebrew, see Schirmann, *Hashirah ha'ivrit* 2:82.

30. This plot goes back, of course, to the biblical story of Jacob and Laban's daughters. It recurs also in other maqamas, and in world literature (e.g., in Boccaccio's *Decameron*).

31. Reichert's translation quoted from Roth, "The 'Wiles of Women'," p. 155. For the Hebrew, see Schirmann, 2:120.

32. "The alleged outpouring of women's speech, the rank flow of words, may be symbolic . . . of the menstrual cycle. In masculine satire the obscure currents and secretions of women's physiology are an obsessive theme." (Steiner, quoted in Brooke-Rose, "Woman as a Semiotic Object," p. 17.) For medieval views on menstruation see references in note 44 below.

33. See I. Toporowsky, ed., *Yehuda Alharizi, Tahkemoni* (Tel Aviv, 1952), pp. 317–21 (a debate between a man and a woman), and D. Yarden, *Immanuel* (a contest in making verses about the beautiful and the ugly woman).

34. C. Sirat, *Jewish Philosophical Thought in the Middle Ages* [Hebrew], (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 226.

35. A. Schimmel, "Eros—Heavenly and Not-so-heavenly—in Sufi Literature and Life," in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, ed. A. L. al-Sayyid Marsot (Malibu, 1977), p. 130.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 126. It is unmistakably referred to by Ibn Zabara: "Take heed of a woman's counsel, for woman is evil and bitter in spirit and hand . . . and of light mind. The sage hath said, ' . . . Ask their counsel and do the opposite.' Whoso heeds them . . . brings it about that both he and they are consumed in the flames" (Hadas's English translation quoted from Roth, "The 'Wiles of Woman' Motif," p. 148).

37. Schimmel, "Eros . . . in Sufi Literature," p. 127.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 124

39. J. M. Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature from the Twelfth Century to Dante* (New York and London, 1975), p. 3. One of Ferrante's central arguments is that, with the decline of neoplatonic philosophy (which encouraged a harmonious view of Intellect, Soul and Nature, and of male/ female as complementary symbolic elements) and the rejection of courtly ethics, the symbolic status of woman also suffered. "The thirteenth century literature shows the strong influence of two antifeminist views: the Aristotelian—of woman as a defective male . . . and the moralist."

40. Thomas Aquinas pointed to the common linguistic root of matrimony, mother and matter; *Ibid.*, p. 104.

41. And compare Ferrante, pp. 8 and 102, to Schimmel, p. 123.

42. For the theme of the world as a disgusting old woman in Arabic and Hebrew poetry, see I. Levin, "Time and World in Hebrew Secular Poetry" [Hebrew], *Otsar yehudey Sefarad* 5 (1952): 68–79.

43. See for example in Alharizi, Toporowsky's ed., pp. 31–33. These ideas in Western religions might well have been prompted by the introduction of Buddhist thought. As shown by Roth (pp. 147–8), "Arabic and Hebrew literature [and especially the maqama] borrowed heavily from ancient Indian literature" (and in turn had much influence on Spanish antifeminist literature).

44. Compare also Schimmel, p. 124, to Ferrante, p. 102.

45. Parts of *Minhat Yehuda* were published in Schirmann, 2:70–86. For the history of this controversy in Spain see Roth's "The 'Wiles of Women';" Schirmann, 2:67ff., 87ff.; D. Pagis, *Hiddush umasoret beshirat hahol* [Innovation and Tradition in Hebrew Secular Poetry] (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 215ff. For its history in Italy, see Pagis, "The Controversy Concerning the Female Image in Hebrew Poetry in Italy" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 9 (1986): 259–300. [See, also, Talya Fishman's essay that follows in this issue.]

46. J. P. Debax as quoted by Brooke-Rose, p. 16.

47. *Diwan des Jehuda ha-Levi*, 2:26. All examples in this section came from Halevi. His is the largest corpus of wedding poems written by a single poet. He also seems to have been the first poet to transform existing popular wedding songs into an artistic, literary genre.

48. This might well be a poetic counterpart to the notion in Judaism that it is a man's duty to sexually satisfy his wife (תענותה לא יגרע). As shown by Goitein ("The Sexual

Mores," p. 49), it is also characteristic of proems to Geniza marriage contracts to mention only the male's sexual duty.

49. *Diwan des Jehuda ha-Levi*, 2:320.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

52. The translations are by P. Dronke, in *The Medieval Lyric* (London, 1968), pp. 86-90, who followed S. M. Stern's deciphering and rendering into the French of the mozarabic *kharjas*. (See his *Les chansons mozarabes* [Palermo, 1951].) Bracketed numbers refer to Stern's numeration. It was Stern who first discovered these Romance texts in Hebrew characters at the end of Hebrew poems. See also his posthumous book, *Hispano-Arabic Strophic Poetry*, ed. L. P. Harvey (Oxford, 1974).

53. I will try to summarize them briefly here: (a) the *kharjas* are vestiges of Arcadian, pre-Christian dramas, set to music and performed by young women in pagan rites of nature; (b) they preserve the folklore of the early Moslem period, and even that of the pre-Islamic era in Spain; (c) they resemble "maidens' songs" in Latin, and (d) they are "lyrical islands" surviving from "lost archipelagos" of feminine lyrics in the Old Spanish tongue. For a detailed presentation of these hypotheses see my book, *Le'ezor shir* [The Hebrew Girdle Poem] (Haifa, 1985), pp. 83, 93-97, 198-99. For reasons of space this part of my paper is scant in references. For bibliography, see notes in *ibid.*, pp. 80-89, 93-97, 187-200.

54. *Diwan des Jehuda ha-Levi*, 1:124.

55. For a more detailed discussion of formulae exploited in the penultimate unit, see my *Le'ezor shir*, pp. 187-201.